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U'khand UCC mandates live-in registration, bans polygamy

The state's small tribal community is exempted from proposed law

DEHRADUN, 6 FEB

Uttarakhand government on Tuesday tabled in the Assembly the Uniform Civil Code bill, the first such move in any state after Independence that could be followed by similar legislation in other BJP-run states.

The hill state's small tribal community is exempted from the proposed law, which also mandates registration of live-in relationships.

The bill says the live-in partners must not be under 18. But if any one of them is under 21, the registrar is bound to inform their parents or guardians.

Children born of live-in relationships will be considered legitimate and deserted women will be entitled to maintenance from their partners.

Coming just ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Uniform Civil Code, Uttarakhand, 2024 bill ticks off an important item on BJP's ideological agenda a common law on marriage, divorce, land, property and inheritance for all citizens, irrespective of their religion.

Pushkar Singh Dhami with others holds a copy of the Constitution at Vidhan Sabha Bhawan in Dehradun on Tuesday **PHOTO: PTI**

It is likely to be studied and possibly implement by BJP governments in states such as Gujarat and Assam. Only Goa has a common civil law, in operation since the Portuguese rule. As it sets out common provisions, the bill effectively bans polygamy and halala without naming them -- practiced among a section of Muslims. Marriages can be solemnised through separate rituals, like saptapadi, nikah and anand karaj, followed by different communities. On Tuesday, the second day of a special session of the Assembly, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami entered the House with a copy of the original Constitution. Ruling party members thumped their desks and chanted "Bharat Mata ki Jai", "Vande Mataram" and "Jai Shri Ram" as Dhami tabled the bill. The bill applies to the whole of Uttarakhand and to people from the state living outside. The bill stipulates a penalty of up to a month in prison or a fine of Rs 10,000, or both, if the partners do not submit a statement on their relationship to the registrar within a month. They will face a higher penalty if they submit false information.

- Children born of live-in relationships will be considered legitimate and deserted women will be entitled to maintenance from their partners.

It also spells out the right to remarry after divorce or the nullification of any marriage provided, there is no appeal pending.

It gives the nod to marriages when the couple are "not within the degrees of prohibited relationship".

—PTI

Fog delays 45 flights at KIA

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

Over 45 flights were delayed at Kempegowda International Airport on Tuesday due to bad weather. Several flights that were to land from Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad were also diverted to Chennai. The airport authorities said the departures were delayed because of dense fog and as the visibility had dipped to 50m. Airlines including Indigo and Vistara issued the delayed notice through X. Indigo requested the passengers to confirm their flight status before leaving for the airport. Vistara Airlines informed that flight UK845 from Mumbai to Bengaluru was diverted to Coimbatore. *—Salar News*

Ex jawan who turned into LeT 'terrorist' held

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Delhi Police has arrested an alleged member of Lashkar-e-Taiba module operating in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara, on Tuesday. The accused, Riyaz Ahmad Rather, who is a retired army personnel, has played an instrumental role in receiving arms and ammunition from across the Line of Control (LoC). He was involved in hatching a conspiracy along with, Khursheed Ahmad Rather and Ghulam Sarwar Rather in receiving arms and ammunition from across LoC by terrorist handlers. *—PTI*

Budget session to be extended by a day till 10 Feb

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The ongoing Budget session of Parliament is being extended by a day till Saturday, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said here. aThe government plans to table a 'white paper' comparing the state of the Indian economy before and after 2014, sources said.The session, which began on 31 January, was otherwise slated to end on 9 February.In her interim budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said that the central government would release a 'White Paper' comparing the state of the Indian economy before and after 2014." Parliament does not function on weekends but there have been instances in when the Houses have met on Saturdays.*—PTI*

Centre says no to mobile towers in critical tiger habitats

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Centre has disallowed installation of mobile towers in core and critical tiger habitats in the country, according to new guidelines by Environment Ministry. In an order issued in January, the ministry highlighted that Standing Committee of National Board for Wildlife (SCNBWL) has been receiving a large number of proposals for erection of mobile towers and laying of optical fibre cables in national parks, sanctuaries, and tiger reserves and corridors. It said while providing connectivity to the people residing within or near wildlife-rich areas should be taken on priority, "the conservation of wildlife habitats should not get affected". *—PTI*

PM INVITES GLOBAL PLAYERS

India to see $67B energy deals in next 5-6 years, says PM

GOA, 6 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said that India will see an investment of USD 67 billion in the energy sector in next 5 to 6 years as he invited global investors to participate in India's growth story.

Inaugurating the second edition of the India Energy Week here, Modi said the Indian economy is growing at the rate of more than 7.5 per cent and the country will soon become the world's third-largest economy.

He invited global players to participate in India's energy sector growth, saying that the country is expected to increase its refining capacity from 254 MMTPA (million metric tonne per annum) to 450 MMTPA by 2030.

He said, "In next 5-6 years, the investment of USD 67 billion is going to be done in energy sector in India."

He further said that India is investing unprecedented money in the energy sector.

Narendra Modi **PHOTO: PTI**

He also said that the country's primary energy demand will be doubled by 2045.

Petrol and diesel prices reduced in India in last two years, said the prime minister recounting the country's energy management strategy in face of global problems.

He said all experts are of the opinion that India is the fastest growing major economy and will soon become the world's third-largest economy. *—PTI*

Dr Syed Altaf is Kidwai's new Interim Director

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

An inquiry committee has recommended appointing Dr Syed Altaf as the Interim Director of Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology in Bengaluru.

According to the statement released by Mohammed Mohsin, Principal Secretary of Medical Education and Vice President of Kidwai Memorial Foundation, the committee suggested relieving the current director Dr V Lokesh from his duties and stated that he can continue as a professor in the Department of Radiation and Oncology until the next meeting.

Dr Syed Altaf **PHOTO: SALAR**

Dr Altaf, a cancer surgeon, has been appointed to the position following allegations of irregularities such as high consultation fees, misuse of grants, and collusion with private organisations that allowed them to charge higher than the approved rates. The committee has also confirmed violations of the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurements (KTPP) Act on medicine procurement and tender proceedings for services such as PET scans and bone marrow transplants. The report claimed that the hospital had mismanaged the maintenance of records. The three-member committee, appointed by the State government, consisted of Dr Arundhathi Chandrasekhar, Commissioner of Treasuries; Guruswamy, Additional Registrar of Cooperative Societies; and Mahadev, Additional Registrar at the Karnataka State Audit and Accounts Department and BBMP Additional Commissioner (Finance).

–Salar News

TROUBLE MOUNTS FOR AAP

ED raids Kejriwal's PA over kickbacks from contractors

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday searched some premises of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar and others. The raid was carried out as part of its probe into charges that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and some officials received kickbacks of Rs 21 crore from a Delhi Jal Board contractor, official sources said.

This action is part of a money laundering investigation focusing on alleged bribes that were garnered through irregularities in the DJB tendering process and purportedly channelled as election funds to AAP the officials said.

A dozen premises in New Delhi were searched by the federal agency's officials from 7 am under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

PHOTO: PTI

The residences of Bibhav Kumar, former Delhi Jal Board member Shalabh Kumar, the office of party Rajya Sabha MP and national Treasurer ND Gupta, and the premises of Chartered Accountant (CA) Pankaj Mangal and others associated with the ruling party in Delhi were covered in the search action.

In response to the raids, Delhi Minister Atishi accused the authorities of attempting to "intimidate" the AAP. These searches are related to an investigation concerning alleged irregularities in the tendering process of the Delhi Jal Board, for which the ED had previously arrested retired Jal Board chief engineer Jagdish Kumar Arora and contractor Anil Kumar Aggarwal on 31 January. Following the ED's assertion that further custodial interrogation was necessary to uncover a "larger conspiracy," a special PMLA court had extended their remand by five days on Monday.

The FIR alleged that Arora awarded contracts to NKG Infrastructure Ltd. for a total cost of Rs 38 crore, despite the company's failure to meet the technical eligibility criteria. *—PTI*

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11 dead, 174 injured in MP cracker unit fire

BHOPAL/HARDA, 6 FEB

At least 11 people were killed and 174 others injured in a powerful explosion and subsequent blaze at a firecrackers factory near Harda town of Madhya Pradesh on Tuesday, a senior official said.

Some videos of the incident surfaced on social media showing the massive fire with intermittent explosions taking place at the site and people frantically running to save themselves. They showed thick plumes of smoke coming from the factory located at Bairagarh on Magardha Road on the outskirts of Harda town.

The cause of the blast was not yet known

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav held a meeting to take stock of the situation and said the Army was being contacted to arrange for helicopters for the rescue work.

Yadav announced a financial assistance of Rs 4 lakh to the kin of each of the deceased and said the entire cost of treatment of the injured persons will be borne by the state government. Burn units in hospitals in Indore, Bhopal and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in the state capital were directed to make necessary arrangements for any emergency. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced Rs 2 lakh ex-gratia to the next of the kin of each of the deceased from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF). *—PTI*

It's 10 years in jail if you're caught cheating

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

A bill, which seeks to deal sternly with malpractices and irregularities in competitive examinations with provisions for a maximum jail term of 10 years and a fine up to Rs 1 crore, was passed in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

Piloting The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said its provisions are meant to safeguard the interest of meritorious students and candidates.

The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha after rejecting amendments proposed by the Opposition members.

Singh said the government "will not allow meritorious (candidates) to be sacrificed at the altar of organised crimes". The move comes against the backdrop of cancellation of a series of competitive tests such as the teacher recruitment exam in Rajasthan, Common Eligibility Test (CET) for Group-D posts in Haryana, recruitment exam for junior clerks in Gujarat and constable recruitment examination in Bihar following question paper leaks.

The bill also proposes a high-level national technical committee on public examinations that will make recommendations to make the computerised examination process more secure. In many instances, it has been observed that organised groups and mafia elements involved in malpractices deploy solver gangs, use impersonation methods and indulge in paper leaks. *—PTI*

EC DUBS AJIT'S FACTION AS REAL NCP, SHARAD CRIES FOUL

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Ajit Pawar faction is the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), Election Commission announced on Tuesday, ending months of speculation over the factional fight with his party founder and uncle Sharad Pawar.

In an order, the Election Commission (EC) also allotted the NCP symbol 'Wall Clock' to the group led by Ajit Pawar.

The decision followed the laid-out tests of maintainability of such a petition which included tests of aims and objectives of party constitution, test of party constitution and tests of majority both organisational and legislative, the commission said.

"The test of majority in the legislative wing found favour in this circumstance of the case, where both groups have found to be working outside the party constitution and the organisational elections," the poll authority observed.

The EC made a concession to the group led by Sharad Pawar by allowing it a "one-time option" to claim a name for its political outfit and provide three preferences by Wednesday afternoon in view of the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections. *—PTI*

NIA chargesheets 12 B'desh men in B'luru

BENGALURU/NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The NIA has filed a charge sheet against 12 Bangladeshi nationals for their alleged involvement in the infiltration and trafficking of foreign nationals into India via the India-Bangladesh border, an official said on Tuesday.

The victims had paid the touts along the border for crossing into India and were directed to reach Bengaluru. The charge sheet was filed in a special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court in Bengaluru on Monday. The accused had entered India illegally, without valid travel documents, and had fraudulently obtained Indian identity documents, a spokesperson of the federal agency said.

According to the NIA, they were trafficked through the porous Indo-Bangla border points in West Bengal and Tripura, with the help of touts operating on both sides of the border.

Eight of them had subsequently been involved in trafficking of several other Bangladeshi nationals in a similar manner, the spokesperson said. The official said a total of 22 such victims of the accused have been identified so far by the agency. *—PTI*

AFTER EAM's VISIT

Iran starts visa-free entry for Indians

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Iran announced a visa-waiver programme for Indians entering the country by air for tourism for a maximum stay of 15 days on Tuesday.

According to the Iranian embassy visa-free entry has been rolled out for Indian citizens from 4 February subject to four conditions. In December, Iran approved a new visa-free programme for India and 32 other countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia.

The Iranian readout said individuals holding ordinary passports will be allowed to enter the country without a visa once every six months, with a maximum stay of 15 days. It said Indians wanting to stay for a longer period or make multiple entries within a six-month period or requiring other types of visas must obtain necessary visas from Iranian missions in India. "The visa abolition outlined in this approval specifically applies to Indian nationals who enter the country just through the air border," it said.

Iranian embassy visa-free entry has been rolled out for Indian citizens from 4 February **PHOTO: PTI**

Last month, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelled to Iran during which he held wide-ranging talks with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on a range of bilateral and regional issues. *—PTI*

CM FINED ₹10K BY HC, SUMMONED ON 6 MARCH

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Karnataka High Court on Tuesday ordered Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to appear in court on 6 March for holding protests and blocking roads in 2022.

It also imposed a fine of Rs 10,000 on him, as well as Congress General Secretary and Karnataka in charge Randeep Singh Surjewala, Ministers MB Patil and Ramalinga Reddy.

It also junked Siddaramaiah's plea to quash an FIR registered against him the case.

It has also asked Surjewala to appear on 7 March and Patil on 11 March. *—Salar News*

Hanuman flag: Mandya bandh called off

MANDYA, 6 FEB

A bandh called by a group of like-minded organisations on Wednesday over the lowering of a saffron flag at Keregodu in Mandya has been called off at the request of district administration. Bajrang Dal had called a bandh on 7 February to protest the removal of the Hanuman flag from a 108-ft flagpole. Following this, organisations, including pro-Dalit groups and progressive collectives, supported the bandh. But Bajrang Dal later postponed the bandh to 9 February. The district administration, under a meeting called by Mandya Deputy Commissioner Kumar and Superintendent of Police Yatish N, requested the organisations to withdraw the bandh, citing potential hardships for students, businesses and the general public.Also,concerns loom over the impending Bajrang Dal bandh on 9 February, as the like-minded forum warns of opposition and potential counter-actions if Mandya faces a shutdown. *—Salar News*

State workers ask govt to amend Gratuity Act

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Karnataka Workers' Union on Tuesday demanded the State government to amend the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972. The act was first introduced 50 years ago and there has been no amendment to it. Gratuity is an amount paid by an employer to its employees for rendering their services for equal to or more than 5 years. The Act provides a scheme for the payment of gratuity to employees engaged in factories, mines, oilfields, plantations, ports, railway companies and shops. As per the Act, workers receive 15 days' wages per year of service as a gratuity. General Secretary of the Karnataka Workers' Union EKN Rajan said, "In the current Act, only the basic wage and dearness allowance of workers are considered. This leaves many workers in the unorganised sector with small payouts when they retire. Lack of sufficient payment fails to ensure a decent standard of living for retirees." *—Salar News*

2 arrested for impersonating BBMP officials

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

City police have arrested two youths who were involved in a job fraud scheme where they impersonated officials from Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) to entice victims with job offers. The accused who are 21 and 22-year-old deceived over 60 victims in the City during October 2023. The police have launched a hunt to arrest three more suspects. The accused reportedly targeted widows and housewives and falsely promised them subsidies from BBMP. *—Salar News*

Open Day at IISc on 24 Feb

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Indian Institute of Science (IISc) Bengaluru is organising an Open Day to demonstrate its activities to the public and students on 24 February between 9am and 5pm. The event will feature experimental demos, lectures, poster presentations, science competitions, exhibitions and contests, the science institute said. Visitors can go around the campus to explore new initiatives related to the science and technology of the institute. An exclusive zone for children will be set up with several science and technology demos. Entry to the public is free. IISc Director Govindan Rangarajan in a message said, "The institute organises an open day every year, and throws its doors open to the public, inviting them to experience its activities and facilities first-hand. We welcome you all to visit the campus, to explore, experience and enjoy the wonders of scientific and technological research and innovation at IISc." *—Salar News*

Malviya hits out at CM for North-South divide

He called it characteristics of 'Tukde Tukde' gang

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

BJP's IT cell incharge Amit Malviya on Tuesday hit out at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for raking up the North-South divide and said it was a typical characteristic of Congress leaders, who are trusted allies of the 'Tukde Tukde' gang. Such tactics not only undermine unity but also pose a significant risk to social harmony, he cautioned.

'Tukde Tukde' gang is a phrase used by the BJP to refer to alleged sympathisers of separatists.

Taking to the micro-blogging site 'X', Malviya said Siddaramaiah should examine the funds Bengaluru gets versus the regions like 'Kalyana Karnataka' and Kalaburagi. "Does he care about the unfair treatment of Bengaluru?" the BJP IT Cell Chief said.

According to Malviya, Siddaramaiah's demand for Rs 5,495 crore special grant was a 'lie'. "The 15th FC did not recommend Special Grant to any State. There is no such recommendation to accept or reject. It is a figment of his imagination."

The Centre has not only devolved taxes but also given Rs 6,212 crore as 50-year interest-free loans to boost Karnataka's capital expenditure as on 11 December, 2023, he said.

Malviya called Siddaramaiah's expectation of a 15 per cent growth rate in tax revenue a 'joke and a lie', given that Covid hit State GDP for two years.

Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah and BJP leader Amit Malviya
PHOTO: PTI

Pointing out that the devolution of funds to states is based on rational criteria, laid out in Article 280, Malviya said it ensures fair distribution of resources.

"Centre's tax devolution to Karnataka has increased by 245.7%, reaching Rs 2.82 lakh crore (under Modi Govt), compared to Rs 81,795 crore under the UPA. This contradicts the false claim of financial neglect or adverse impact due to the revised tax share percentages," he charged.

—PTI

BJP protests against 'anti-cow' Congress govt

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

BJP in Karnataka on Tuesday staged a protest with cattle accusing Congress government in the State of being 'anti-cow'.Party leaders gathered at Freedom Park here with cows and put banners on the vehicle which read: "This government is not in favour of livestock."BJP state general secretary P Rajeev alleged that the government was 'anti-cow' because "it does not want any cows in Bengaluru". Also, 'Raitha Morcha' State President AS Nadahalli charged the Congress government with stopping all the pro-farmer schemes implemented by BJP and those started during the tenure of BS Yeddyurappa as Chief Minister. *—PTI*

BJP FLAYS CONGRESS OVER NEWSPAPER ADS

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

BJP on Tuesday lodged a protest with Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot against the State government's alleged use of public money to issue front-page advertisements in newspapers asking people to take part in 'Chalo Delhi' march against the Central government.

Ahead of a planned showdown in Delhi led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on 7 February at Jantar Mantar, the Congress government issued an advertisement in newspapers asking people to march to Delhi. The advertisement read: "To protest against the financial atrocities committed by the Central government on Kannadigas and Karnataka – Chalo Delhi".

In its memorandum to Gehlot, BJP alleged that the advertisement "incites the people of Karnataka with misleading and false information regarding devolution of funds from the Centre". The Opposition party in the State said using the State funds to publish advertisements against the Central government is "the most shocking of all the illegalities and wrongs committed by the State government". *—PTI*

Flyover opened amid tussle with Railways

HASSAN, 6 FEB

A longstanding conflict between Hassan district administration and the railway department over a railway flyover here has concluded. The district administration took matters into their own hands, removing barriers overnight and throwing the flyover open for vehicular traffic.

The completion of the two-lane road on the railway flyover, connecting Hassan NR Circle to the new bus stand,faced an unexpected hurdle as railway department halted traffic, citing concerns about the simultaneous operation of the flyover and level crossing.The impasse evolved into a discreet battle between the district administration and the railway department for around 20 days. District Collector Sathyabhama C, leveraging his authority, intervened to reopen the flyover for traffic, earning commendation from the public. *—Salar News*

Father, son arrested for woman's murder

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

KR Puram police have arrested father and son for murdering a 40-year-old woman over her alleged extramarital affair.

Initially, it was reported the victim Netra was killed by her son on Friday in Bheemaiah Layout after a spat over her not serving breakfast to him. The son surrendered to the police and claimed that he attacked the mother on her head with a metal rod.The investigation revealed the involvement of Netra's husband, Chandrappa, in the murder.Police discovered two fingerprints on the murder weapon. Reportedly, Chandrappa and his son conspired to murder Netra after discovering her alleged affair. The accused claimed that Netra's behaviour including prolonged absence from home and alcohol addiction led to their drastic actions.

The son decided to surrender believing that juvenile punishment would be less severe. *—Salar News*

BALANCING ACT

A worker carries out repair works at Vidhana Soudha premises for the State budget session and Janata Darshan, in Bengaluru on Tuesday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

DEVE GOWDA REQUESTS CENTRE FOR RESERVOIR

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

MP HD Deve Gowda on Tuesday requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to help resolve Karnataka's water crisis by building a reservoir with a capacity of 30 thousand million cubic feet.

Participating in a discussion on the motion of thanks to the President's address, the former prime minister also requested Modi to include the state's Kadugolla community in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Deve Gowda said he had taken up the matter with Modi during their first interaction in the new Parliament building. He said the Prime Minister had assured him that it would be cleared. *—PTI*

AGAINST THE CENTRE

The protesters would demand Centre set right the losses allegedly incurred by Karnataka to the tune of Rs 1.87 lakh crore, during five years under 15th Finance Commission ***PHOTO: PTI***

State Congress to protest in Delhi today

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Stepping up the attack on the BJP-led government at the Centre, the ruling Congress in Karnataka led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will stage a protest in New Delhi on Wednesday, alleging "injustice" to the State in tax devolution and grants-in-aid over the past few years. The protest by all Congress legislators and MPs from the State, including Ministers, will begin at 11am on Wednesday at Jantar Mantar in the national capital. The protesters would demand Centre set right the losses allegedly incurred by Karnataka to the tune of Rs 1.87 lakh crore, during five years under 15th Finance Commission.Incidentally, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, along with his Cabinet colleagues will stage a protest in the national capital against the Centre's alleged negligence towards the southern State on Thursday.However, BJP leaders including Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman have come down heavily on allegations that Centre is withholding funds meant for non-BJP governed states including Karnataka, saying it is a "politically-vitiated narrative" that "vested interests" are happy to go about saying so.Former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said the protest is a "political stunt" to divert attention from the mistakes of the Congress government.

CM writes letter to MPs

Siddaramaiah on Tuesday wrote letters to all Members of Parliament of State requesting them to take part in Delhi Chalo protest against Central government condemning the financial injustice committed towards Karnataka. Led by him, all the MLAs and MP DK Suresh will participate in the protests on Wednesday. Of the 28 Lok Sabha members in the State, 27 are BJP MPs, one MP, Prajwal Revanna, is from JD(S) and Sumalatha Ambareesh is an independent candidate representing Mandya. The letters were addressed to Rajya Sabha members from the State, including Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. He said, "The gross injustice in the distribution of tax share to Karnataka, neglect and delay in giving permission and assistance for projects, are affecting the life of the people of the State. The elected representatives are aware of this. On behalf of all the people of Karnataka, I request you to participate in this agitation, and make it a success."However, BJP MP Tejasvi Surya declined the invitation on X. He said, "I politely decline Karnataka CM Sri Siddaramaiah's invitation to attend tomorrow's faux protest. I will, however, address a press conference at New Delhi, to expose the devious, divisive & false propaganda of the CM & Congress with respect to tax devolution to Karnataka." *—Salar News/PTI*

Mahila Cong bats for women's quota act

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

The All India Mahila Congress demanded the immediate implementation of the Women Reservation Act to ensure adequate representation of women in politics.

Speaking at the event of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, Pushpa Amarnath, President of Karnataka Pradesh Mahila Congress said, "We will look forward to women's representation in politics in order to address the women's issue and improve the women's welfare in the society."

The Mahila Congress advocated the demand received by women from diverse backgrounds through the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra seeking the

- Additionally, they call for equal pay for equal work to bridge the gender pay gap

improvement in women's welfare development economically, socially, and politically.It further advocated for price regulation of essential commodities to reduce the burden of price rises on women and families. Additionally, they call for equal pay for equal work to bridge the gender pay gap.

They further added that there is an urgent need for improved healthcare infrastructure and sanitation infrastructure, especially in rural areas in the country *—Salar News*

ARCHBISHOP THAZHATH NAMED CBCI PREZ

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) on Tuesday said Archbishop Andrews Thazhath of Thrissur in Kerala has been re-elected as its President. On the sixth day of General Body Meeting here, CBCI also announced Archbishop George Antonysamy of Madras-Maylapore as Vice-President I, and Bishop Joseph Mar Thomas of Bathery as Vice President II. "Couto's extensive background in pastoral care and his proactive engagement in social issues align closely with the CBCI's objectives of promoting social justice and community welfare." The term of the leadership will be from 2024 to 2026, it said. *—PTI*

Govt officials misuse rain relief funds

CHIKKAMAGALURU, 6 FEB

A village accountant was suspended and 15 officials from Revenue and Agriculture Departments were under scanner for misappropriation of funds at Kalkere and Antarghatte of Kadur taluk in Chikkamagaluru district.

Village office administrator MS Palakshamurthy and other officials carried out the malpractices in the distribution of compensation funds to the tune of Rs 2 crore for crop loss due to heavy rains during 2022-23 monsoon season. They allotted compensation to individuals who neither cultivated agricultural land nor qualified as farmers, including those who have died.Government, in response to the rain relief losses, had outlined specific compensation rates for both agricultural and horticultural crops. Investigations exposed a nexus where officials and intermediaries manipulated the system to siphon funds. The scam involved falsely categorising millet cultivation as horticulture to exploit higher compensation rates. Besides, multiple individuals with the same name in the same locality had funds transferred to their accounts. Shockingly, compensation was even directed to deceased individuals. It was found that in 651 cases, compensation had been erroneously disbursed, while in 157 cases, the rightful recipients had received the funds. The remaining 140 cases are still under investigation. *—Salar News*

Farmers raise voices for fair treatment

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Thousands of farmers from across Karnataka arrived in Bengaluru's Freedom Park on Tuesday, demanding immediate action from the government to meet several of their demands-The protest was led by Kuruburu Shanthakumar, President of Karnataka state Sugarcane Growers Association in which at least 5,000 farmers participated.

They also requested a minimum monthly pension scheme for farmers above 60. "We just want the ministry to understand the problems of farmers and fulfil our demands. The budget allotment for farmers in Karnataka has to increase. Even if the protest in Bangalore didn't work, we have another protest on the 13th and that will be in Delhi. We are planning to directly approach the central government for our needs," said Kuruburu Shanthakumar, the President of Karnataka state Sugarcane Growers Association. *—Salar News*

LIKE 'RAM LALLA'

Ancient Vishnu idol unearthed in Krishna river

RAICHUR, 6 FEB

An ancient idol of Lord Vishnu and a Shivalinga have been unearthed from Krishna river near Shakti Nagar in Raichur city during the construction of a bridge on Raichur-Telangana border.

The Vishnu idol has all the 'dashavatara' or the 10 incarnations featured around its 'aura'. and has features resembling the recently consecrated statue of 'Ram Lalla' in Ayodhya. Padmaja Desai, a lecturer in ancient history and archaeology at Raichur University, said the idol must have adored the sanctum sanctorum of a temple and must have been dropped in the river at the time of possible destruction of the temple. Vishnu is in the standing position and has four arms in this statue, with his two upper hands holding the 'shankha' and 'chakra' and the two lower hands in the position of granting boons ('kati hasta' and 'varada hasta'). The idol resembles Venkateshwara as mentioned in the scriptures, the lecturer said.However, the idol does not feature Garuda, which is usually found in Vishnu idols. Instead there are two fan-bearing women. Since Vishnu is fond of decoration, this idol showing a smiling Vishnu is decorated with garlands and ornaments, she said.

The Vishnu idol has all the 'dashavatara' or the 10 incarnations featured around its 'aura' ***PHOTO: SALAR***

Archaeology department officials took charge of their safekeeping.Raichur, witnessed 163 battles between kingdoms. The idols might have hidden in the riverbed to shield them from the onslaughts of Bahamani Sultans and Adil Shahis, according to legend.

"The statue is intact barring some damage to its nose," and the idols may date back to the 11th century during the period of Kalyana Chalukyas, she said. The stone type identified in the discovery, described as green mixed rock, is indicative of materials used by the Kalyana Chalukyas. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

DMK MP's remark against Union Min triggers controversy

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Lok Sabha witnessed a war of words over a remark made by TR Baalu against Union Minister L Murugan, on Tuesday. Ruling BJP MPs asked the DMK leader to apologise for "insulting" a Dalit. As Baalu did not heed to the demand, Speaker Om Birla, expunged the word from the records while DMK members along with the Congress and Left MPs staged a walk out. The incident took place when the House was discussing a question related to flood relief to Tamil Nadu during the Question Hour. After two of his party colleagues asked questions on the subject, Baalu asked a supplementary. Murugan, Union Minister of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, who also hails from Tamil Nadu, said DMK leader was asking "irrelevant" questions. *—PTI*

EC gave ruling under pressure, claims Sharad-led group

MUMBAI, 6 FEB

The Election Commission's decision to announce the Ajit Pawar faction as the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), was taken under pressure, a leader of the Sharad Pawar-led group said on Tuesday. "This is the murder of democracy. What happened is unfortunate," former Maharashtra minister Anil Deshmukh said. The poll panel gave this ruling under "pressure from above," Deshmukh told a TV channel. He did not elaborate. The Election Commission's ruling on Tuesday ended months of speculation over the factional fight between Ajit Pawar and party founder and his uncle Sharad. The Commission also allotted the NCP symbol 'wall clock' to the group led by Ajit Pawar. The decision followed the laid-out tests of maintainability of such a petition which included tests of aims and objectives of party constitution, test of party constitution and tests of majority both organisational and legislative, the commission said.*—PTI*

7 ships carrying fertilisers rerouted from Red Sea: Govt

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The government on Tuesday said that seven ships carrying fertilisers have been rerouted from the Red Sea so far due to disturbances. In a written reply to the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Chemicals and Fertilisers Bhagwanth Khuba said the Department of Fertilizers is regularly monitoring the status of fertiliser ships in close coordination with the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of External Affairs and Indian Navy to provide security to the shipments carrying fertilisers to India. "So far, 7 ships carrying Fertilisers have been rerouted from the Red Sea.*—PTI*

Assam Assembly adjourned twice amid ruckus

GUWAHATI, 6 FEB

Assam Assembly was adjourned twice by Speaker Biswajit Daimary on Tuesday morning. Opposition and treasury bench members engaged in verbal duels and refused to be pacified even when the chair intervened several times. The first adjournment was for 10 minutes during Question Hour when MLAs of the Ruling, as well as Opposition parties, were locked in debates, ignoring appeals by Daimary to maintain decorum. As the House re-assembled, Speaker requested the members to abide by the rules and procedures for the conduct of business in the House. I request the members to allow each other to speak," he said, while also expressing displeasure over both sides not listening to his repeated appeals for maintaining decorum. *—PTI*

Gujarat govt paid ₹8,200 cr in excess to Adani Power: Cong

Power minister said electricity is purchased as per the 'merit order'

GANDHINAGAR, 6 FEB

Congress on Tuesday alleged the Gujarat government has paid Rs 8,200 crore in excess to Adani Power towards electricity purchase charges in two years which it dubbed "favouritism", a claim dismissed by the power minister who cited the rise in coal purchase cost.

Congress also demanded that the government recover the "additional Rs 8,265 crore" from Adani and invest it in increasing the capacity of state-run power generators.

During Question Hour of the budget session of the Assembly, Congress MLA Tushar Chaudhary sought to know the rates at which the government purchased electricity from Adani Power Ltd during 2022 and 2023.

In his reply, Power Minister Kanubhai Desai said electricity is purchased as per the "merit order" system which was introduced by the former Congress-led UPA government. "The state government had entered into an agreement with Adani Power in 2007 to purchase power at Rs 2.89 per unit under bid-1 and at Rs 2.35 per unit under bid-2 for 25 years. Such power purchase agreements were also signed with two other private players - Tata Power and Essar Power," Desai stated in a written reply.

Congress also demanded that the government recover the 'additional Rs 8,265 crore' from Adani PHOTO: PTI

- Congress MLA Amit Chavda said as against an average energy charge of Rs 2.62 per unit agreed to in 2007 for 25 years, the state government paid an average charge of Rs 7.18 per unit in 2022

Since these thermal power generators were dependent on imported coal from Indonesia, they went into trouble and shut their plants after the coal prices shot up exponentially after 2021, the minister stated, adding that revised agreements were signed in 2018 and 2022 to adjust the rise in coal purchase cost.

Unhappy with the reply, Congress MLA Amit Chavda said as against an average energy charge of Rs 2.62 per unit agreed to in 2007 for 25 years, the state government paid an average charge of Rs 7.18 per unit in 2022 and Rs 5.33 per unit in 2023.

"Despite the agreement, the government paid Rs 8,265 crore more to Adani Power. We are worried because taxpayers' money was paid to Adani. Eight years are still left for the completion of 25 years. So, are you planning to review your decision and sign a new agreement with Adani?" asked Chavda. Another Congress MLA, Shailesh Parmar, wondered why state-owned units are not able to produce enough electricity even though the state's installed capacity has increased over the years.' *—PTI*

Priyanka dubs PM's jab at Nehru 'shameful'

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

- Modi's nearly 100-minute speech was laced with sharp attacks on Congress and the Gandhi family, and he said the party "never trusted India's potential"

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra Tuesday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "misrepresenting" lines from a speech of Jawaharlal Nehru and said not only is this "shameful" but it also shows the "bitterness" in the minds of the BJP towards the freedom movement and historical struggles for nation building.

In his reply to the debate in Lok Sabha on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address on Monday, Modi made repeated attacks on Nehru, claiming Congress leader thought Indians were lazy and of low intelligence.

Modi's nearly 100-minute speech was laced with sharp attacks on Congress and the Gandhi family, and he said the party "never trusted India's potential". Hitting back at Modi, Priyanka said, "Did Pandit Nehru, the guardian of India's consciousness, consider Indians lazy? Yesterday in the temple of democracy, Parliament, Modi made this very allegation against Pandit Nehru. Is there any truth in this?"

Before thinking anything, read and listen to that speech of Nehru, she said and shared the audio recording of the speech and the Hindi quote from it.

"Our people, forgetting to trust themselves, think that and other people will help them. Our village people are strong and nice. It has become a habit that instead of taking matters in their own hands they lean on officers and the government... Communities don't progress with the help of officers, they progress on their own strength. *—PTI*

REAL NCP

Supporters of NCP (Ajit Pawar's faction) celebrate after the Election Commission of India announced Pawar's faction as the real Nationalist Congress Party, in Mumbai, on Tuesday PHOTO:PTI

Soren owned land illegally, claims video released by BJP

RANCHI, 6 FEB

BJP's Jharkhand unit on Tuesday released a video clip claiming that arrested former chief minister Hemant Soren does own a piece of land, which the Enforcement Directorate (ED) accused him of illegally acquiring.

The claim was made a day after Soren challenged BJP in the Jharkhand Assembly to prove corruption charges against him, asserting that if the accusations were proved, he would quit politics. Soren was arrested by the ED on 31 January after a marathon seven-hour interrogation in connection with a money laundering case linked to an alleged land fraud. In the 58-second video clip released by Opposition BJP, a man, identifying himself Santosh Munda, is seen saying that the piece of land at Bargain in Ranchi district belongs to Soren.

Talking to reporters, Jharkhand BJP President Babulal Marandi said, "The man is the caretaker of the land. It is known to everyone in the area who its owner is." Marandi, a former chief minister, alleged: "In a bid to hide black money, Soren purchased that land in the name of someone else."

When contacted for their comment, JMM spokespersons did not respond to repeated calls. "I challenge BJP to prove corruption charges against me. If someone proves that I possess 8.50 acres of land, I will resign from politics," Soren had said in his speech during the trust vote of the Champai Soren government on Monday. *—PTI*

The claim was made after Hemant Soren challenged BJP in Jharkhand Assembly to prove corruption charges against him PHOTO: PTI

'Will repeal PMLA if Cong returns to power'

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

P Chidambaram PHOTO: PTI

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram has said that the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, is being "completely misused" to target opposition leaders and if his party returns to power, it would repeal the law to enact a better legislation.

The former Union finance minister also said that the law was not the "UPA's baby" as it was passed during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government and only notified under the Manmohan Singh regime after pressure was mounted by the Financial Action Task Force. "This law has been completely misused and which is why I have been saying that if the Congress comes back to power, we will repeal this law and reenact a better law. This is on top of the agenda," Chidambaram told Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal during the latter's "Dil Se" YouTube programme that was released on Tuesday. *—PTI*

'SEAT-SHARING TALKS ON'

Mamata very much part of INDIA: Rahul

GUMLA, 6 FEB

Mamata Banerjee PHOTO: PTI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said that West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee is "very much" part of the Opposition bloc INDIA, on Tuesday.

Negotiations are going on among the members of the alliance over seat sharing, and "that is normal", he added.

Last week, Banerjee had said that her party TMC won't fight the Lok Sabha polls in alliance with the Congress in West Bengal. She accused Congress of joining hands with CPI(M) to assist BJP in the elections.

On Bihar CM Nitish Kumar parting ways with alliance, and joining BJP-led NDA, Gandhi said, "You can guess what would have been the reasons for his leaving. We will fight in Bihar as part of INDIA alliance."

Tribal land being snatched in name of development: Rahul

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed that land parcels of tribals are being "snatched" in the name of development in the country.

Gandhi whose 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' resumed from Jharkhand's Khunti district this morning alleged that the previous BJP government in state had acquired acres of land of tribals but such resources remained "unutilised".

He said the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre had introduced a land acquisition law, under which it was provisioned that no tribal land would be taken without the consent of Gram Sabha.

Speaking on his promise to remove the 50 per cent cap on reservation if the opposition bloc INDIA comes to power at Centre after Lok Sabha polls, he said, "It is believed that there are 8 per cent tribal people, 15 per cent Dalits and 50 per cent Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in country. Then, why is there only a 50 per cent limit on the reservation?"

Gandhi on Tuesday reiterated that a nationwide caste census and removal of the 50 per cent cap on reservation if the Opposition bloc forms a government at the Centre after the Lok Sabha elections this year. 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra', which started in Manipur on 14 January, is scheduled to cover 6,71km in 67 days, passing through 110 districts in 15 states, before culminating in Mumbai on 20 March. *—PTI*

Centre trying to scare AAP leaders: Atishi

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Delhi minister and senior AAP leader Atishi said, BJP-led Centre is trying to "scare and silence" the party by conducting ED raids on its leaders.

Enforcement Directorate (ED) searched the premises of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal secretary Bibhav Kumar and AAP Rajya Sabha MP and party's treasurer ND Gupta as part of a money laundering case.

"Yesterday, I had said that I would be doing an 'explosive expose' on ED at 10am today. To stop this expose and scare the AAP, ED has been conducting raids against AAP leaders and workers since 7am. Raids are underway at the residences of our leader ND Gupta and the PA of CM Arvind Kejriwal," said Atishi.

The minister also alleged that the statements of witnesses and accused related to the excise policy case were extracted by the probe agency by force and threat.

"We have also demanded in the court that the ED produce video and audio recordings of the interrogation," she said after she alleges that ED has deleted all the audio recordings of one-and-half-years of interrogation. "I have two questions, what does the ED want to hide? How many statements have been recorded by ED, how many of them are on camera and out of those, which of the statements have audio recordings?", questions Atishi. About 10 premises in national capital are being covered as part of the ED raids. It was not immediately clear if the searches were part of an ongoing money laundering investigation or in connection with a fresh case. *—PTI*

Atishi also alleged that statements of witnesses and accused were extracted by the probe agency by force and threat PHOTO: PTI

OVER ₹4.5 CRORE SEIZED

ED raids many places in WB in 'embezzlement' of MGNREGA funds

KOLKATA, 6 FEB

Enforcement Directorate (ED) started simultaneous searches at multiple places in West Bengal, in connection with embezzlement of MGNREGA funds.

ED was conducting searches at the residence of a West Bengal Civil Services (WBCS) officer in Salt Lake's IA Block. He was earlier posted as a block development officer in Dhaniakhali in Hooghly district.

Searches were also underway at government accommodation of a WBCS officer in Jhargram district, and beside the searches, he was being questioned by officers of the agency.

Searches were also being conducted at a property linked to a state government employee in Baharampur in Murshidabad district. He was posted with the Panchayat Department.

"An amount of Rs 4.5 crore was detected in his sister's account. The money is suspected to be from MGNREGA funds.

The searches were being conducted after evidence of their involvement was found in the "irregularities".

Searches were also underway at government accommodation of a WBCS officer in Jhargram district PHOTO: PTI

ED's raids, an attempt to divert attention from dharna over Bengal's dues: TMC

Trinamool Congress denounced the coordinated Enforcement Directorate (ED) searches in West Bengal. They said "Vendetta politics" and a "desperate manoeuvre" by BJP to divert attention from the TMC's ongoing dharna demands clearance of state's dues.

ED started simultaneous searches at multiple places in West Bengal, including residences of some state officers, in connection with its investigation into alleged embezzlement of MGNREGA funds, on Tuesday. However, West Bengal BJP dismissed these allegations as "baseless". "The reality is that TMC is deeply mired in corruption, with nearly every leader facing corruption allegations," said BJP leader Samik Bhattacharya.

Senior TMC leader Shashi Panja asserted, "This is an attempt to divert public and media's attention from the TMC's ongoing dharna demanding clearance of state's dues. This is a clear example of vendetta politics." Senior TMC leaders Partha Chatterjee, Jyotipriyo Mallick and Anubrata Mondal have been arrested by central agencies in various corruption cases.

Recently, the central agencies have also conducted searches at various locations, including the residences of Food and Supplies Minister Rathin Ghosh and Urban Development Minister Firhad Hakim, in connection with recruitment in municipalities.

TMC is staging a dharna near statue of Dr BR Ambedkar in Red Road area of central Kolkata to press for its demand for immediate clearance of West Bengal's dues by the Centre. *—Salar News*

ED attaches assets of Bihar JD(U) MLC in 'illegal' mining case

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Enforcement Directorate said it has attached two immovable assets worth over Rs 26 crore "acquired" by Bihar MLC and JD(U) leader Radha Charan Sah. This was part of a money laundering investigation linked to alleged illegal sand mining in the state. The money laundering case stems from a total of 19 FIRs registered by Bihar Police under various sections of the IPC and Bihar Mineral Rule, 2019 against Broad Son Commodities Private Limited and others. Sah used it (proceeds of crime) in the acquisition and development of a resort in Manali in Himachal Pradesh through a company where his sons are shareholders and to carry out construction at a school in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, run by his family-owned trust, the ED alleged. *—PTI*

Man gifts helmets to guests at wedding in Ch'garh

CHHATTISGARH, 6 FEB

A man in Chhattisgarh's Korba district used his daughter's wedding as an opportunity to raise awareness about road safety and distributed helmets as a return gift to guests.Family members of SedYadav, a resident of the Mudapar area in Korba city, also danced wearing helmets at the wedding that took place on Monday.SedYadav's daughter Nilima, a sports teacher, tied the knot with KhamhanYadav of Lankahuda village in Sarangarh-Bilaigarh district."I felt my daughter's wedding was the best occasion to raise awareness about road safety. I told the guests that life is precious, and I appealed to them not to drink and drive as most road accidents occur due to drunk driving," said SedYadav. *—PTI*

Goa bans sale of 'gobi manchurian' over hygiene concern

PANAJI, 6 FEB

A civic body in North Goa has banned the sale of the popular street food 'gobi-manchurian' at roadside stalls in its jurisdiction. The decision was taken after concerns were raised about the unhygienic conditions in which the dish was prepared. Municipal council of Mapusa town passed a resolution last week banning the dish from being sold by street food vendors, said, MMC chairperson, PriyaMishal. Vendors operate in unhygienic conditions and use synthetic colours to prepare 'gobimanchurian'," Mishal said.Council unanimously passed a resolution to not permit the sale of the dish at the temple fair and later extended the ban to all roadside stalls in the MMC jurisdiction, said chairperson. In 2022, state Food and Drugs Administration (FDA) issued a circular to the Mormugao Municipal Council in South Goa to restrict the number of stalls selling 'gobimanchurian' during the fair of Shree Damodar Temple in Vasco. A senior FDA official said 'gobimanchurian' sellers use a sub-standard sauce made of a powder that contains extracts of 'reetha' (Indian soapberry). *—PTI*

SC sentences man to 30 yrs in jail for raping minor

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Supreme court has sentenced a man to 30 years in jail for raping a seven-year-old girl in a temple in Madhya Pradesh, 2018. Victim girl's grandmother lodged an FIR against the man who was 40 years old at the time of the crime, for kidnapping and raping the minor. The convict took the victim to a temple and committed the crime.After finding the man guilty, the trial court awarded him the capital punishment under Section 376 AB (rape on woman under 12 years of age) of Indian Penal Code. Madhya Pradesh High Court, however, commuted the same to life imprisonment for the remainder of the convict's natural life. *—PTI*

Mumbai hostel worker ends life; in-charge held

THANE, 6 FEB

A 26-year-old manager of a hostel meant for paying guests allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself at his residence in Maharashtra's Navi Mumbai township, on Tuesday.Police arrested a 32-year-old man who operated a private hostel, located in Ulve area, on charges of abducting the victim and abetting his suicide. The accused suspected that the victim misappropriated Rs 60,000 of the hostel's funds which were later recovered from him. On Sunday, accused, along with some associates who are yet to be identified, allegedly abducted the victim from Ulve.They took him to a flat near a temple in Divale village and allegedly assaulted him with an iron pipe. *—PTI*

Kochhars' arrest in ICICI loan case illegal: HC

HC says arrest was made without sending appearance notice

MUMBAI, 6 FEB

Former ICICI Bank CEO Chanda Kochhar and her husband Deepak Kochhar ***PHOTO: EPS***

Bombay High Court on Tuesday held that the arrest of ICICI Bank's former managing director and CEO Chanda Kochhar and her husband Deepak Kochhar by CBI in the Videocon loan case was illegal.

A division bench of Justices Anuja Prabhudessai and NR Borkar passed the verdict today confirming the interim bail granted to the couple on 9 January, 2023.

Chanda and Deepak were arrested by CBI on 24 December on allegations of cheating and irregularities in loan of Rs 3,250 crore granted in 2012 to the Videocon Group.

The complainant had alleged that Kochhar's husband and her family members benefited from the dealings.

It was alleged that when Kochhar was at the helm of affairs at ICICI Bank, she cleared a loan for Videocon Group of Companies. As quid pro quo, her husband's company Nu Renewable allegedly received investment from Videocon. The loan later turned into a non-performing asset (NPA) and was termed as bank fraud.

The duo moved High Court seeking quashing of the case, declaring their arrest illegal and release from detention.

A co-ordinate bench on 9 January last year ordered their interim release from judicial custody.

The Court also held that the arrest was in violation of Section 41A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) which mandates sending notice for appearance before the concerned police officer.

Senior Advocate Amit Desai for Chanda argued that they are not insisting that the court quash the FIR.

He reasoned that the couple had filed another petition challenging the sanction granted by ICICI Bank to prosecute their former MD & CEO.

Desai however maintained that the Kochhars had been arrested illegally and they violated the mandated procedures under the Code of Criminal Procedure.

He also cited the interim order of 9 January, 2023 in which even the division bench had noted that the identical arrest memos of the Kochhars did not record any specific grounds for arrest as mandated under Section 41 (notice to be issued before arrest) of CrPC.

Meanwhile, advocate Kuldeep Patil appearing for CBI, argued that the interim order only considered the arrest memo and referred neither to the case diary nor the remand application.

He argued that even the chargesheet against Chanda Kochhar contained evidence of non-co-operation.

He also rebutted Desai's contention that Kochhar had not been arrested by a female officer. He argued that male police officers are not barred from arresting females as long as there is no physical contact. He added that a female officer was present when the arrest was made. *—Courtesy, Bar & Bench*

TN CM WINDS UP SPAIN TRIP, SECURES RS 540 CRORE DEALS

CHENNAI, 6 FEB

Tamil Nadu government signed a memorandum of understanding with Spain-based Edibon.

Edibon, a worldwide benchmark company in teaching equipment for engineering and technical education, signed a commitment of Rs 540 crore to state.

The MoU was exchanged in the presence of Chief Minister MK Stalin in Spain and the company officials on 5 February during the last leg of his visit to that country to woo investments into Tamil Nadu. The chief minister would return to state capital on Wednesday.

State Industries Minister TRB Rajaa, Secretary to Chief Minister P Umanath, and Managing Director and CEO of Guidance Tamil Nadu V Vishnu, were present on the occasion.

"Wrapped up exhilarating talks with top executives from Spain's industrial giants – Gestamp, Talgo and Edibon. Convinced them of the boundless opportunities in Tamil Nadu, India's manufacturing powerhouse. Thrilled to seal the deal with Edibon, securing a massive investment of Rs 540 crore," Stalin said in a post on 'X'.

Gestamp is a Spanish multinational automotive engineering company, while Talgo is a Spanish manufacturer of intercity, standard, and high-speed passenger trains. Also, Stalin had a fruitful discussion with Mabtree, a company engaged in R&D in immunotherapies. *—PTI*

FOR PUBLIC JOBS

SC examines if states can classify SC, ST quota

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Supreme Court ***PHOTO: PTI***

Supreme Court commenced examining whether a state government can a sub-classification in the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes for grant of reservation in admissions and public jobs. A seven-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud is also examining the validity of the Punjab Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act, 2006 which provided 50 percent quota and the first preference' to 'Valmikis' and 'Mazhabi Sikhs' castes in public jobs inside the quota meant for the Scheduled Castes (SCs).The benchis hearing 23 petitions, including the lead one filed by Punjab government challenging the 2010 verdict of Punjab and Haryana High Court.

High Court had struck down Section 4(5) of the Punjab law, which gave 50 per cent SC quota to 'Valmikis' and 'Mazhabi Sikhs', as unconstitutional on grounds, including that the provision violated a five-judge Constitution bench judgement of 2004 of the Supreme Court in the case of EV Chinnaiah vs. State of Andhra Pradesh.

The Chinnaiah judgement had held that any 'sub-classification' of the Scheduled Castes would violate Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution.

The 2004 verdict had stated that only Parliament, and not state legislatures, can exclude castes deemed to be SC from the Presidential List under Article 341 of the Constitution.

Punjab, in 2011, had come to the top court assailing High Court's verdict, saying the apex court's 2004 judgement was not applicable to it. Taking up the plea of the Punjab government, a five-judge bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra (since retired), on August 27, 2020, differed with the Chinnaiah judgement and referred it for adjudication by a larger bench of seven judges or more for an authoritative pronouncement. In central-government funded higher education institutions, 22.5 percent of available seats are reserved for Scheduled Caste and 7.5 percent for Scheduled Tribe (ST) students. *—PTI*

INDIA SENDS AID TO ZAMBIA FOR CHOLERA OUTBREAK

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

India on Tuesday sent around 3.5 tonnes of aid, including medicines, to Zambia to help the country deal with an outbreak of cholera. Officials said the aid was sent in commercial cargo aircraft."Following an outbreak of cholera in Zambia, India today sent humanitarian aid on commercial cargo aircraft," an official said."The aid weighing approximately 3.5 tonnes comprises water purification supplies, chlorine tablets, and hydration in the form of ORS sachets," he said. *—PTI*

Tourists at the snow-covered Mall Road after a fresh snowfall, in Manali on Tuesday; Police and SDRF personnel at rescue work after massive landslide at Ashwani Khad in Himachal; Tourists ride horses amid fresh snowfall at Kufri near Shimla ***PHOTO: PTI***

Now, only FSSAI nod must for food products

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Government has approved various amendments in food safety and standard regulations, under which only one certification from food regulator FSSAI will be required for food products.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will issue a draft notification in this regard and will seek stakeholders' comments before finalising the amendments.

For food products, certifications from Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and AGMARK will not be needed if these amendments are finalised.

The meeting was held under Chairmanship of Union Health Secretary Apurva Chandra.

Ministry said that "only FSSAI certification would be mandatory for food products following finalisation of the amendments."

After the amendments are finalised, food businesses would not have to go to different authorities for mandatory certification with only FSSAI certification being made mandatory for food products. Other approvals include standards of Mead (Honey wine) and Alcoholic Ready-to-drink (RTD) beverages, revision of standards of milk fat products, standards for Haleem etc. *—PTI*

Snowfall, rain in Himachal block 473 roads

SHIMLA, 6 FEB

Over 470 roads, including four national highways, remained closed in Himachal Pradesh on Tuesday after snowfall and rain in several parts.

According to the centre, 473 roads were closed while 398 transformers and 38 water supply schemes were disrupted.

In Himachal, January was recorded as the driest in the past 17 years as state received 6.8 mm rains against normal rainfall of 85.3 mm, a deficit of 92 per cent.

Of the total, 153 roads were closed for vehicles in Lahaul and Spiti, 134 in Shimla, 68 in Kullu, 61 in Chamba, 46 in Mandi, eight in Sirmaur, two in Kinnaur and one in Kangra.

In the past 24 hours, Khadrala received 4 cm of snow, Bharmour 3 cm, Kufri 2 cm, Gondla 1.3 cm and Sangla 0.5 cm while Kalpa, Kukumseri, Narkanda and Keylong received traces of snow.

The minimum and maximum temperatures remained below normal. Kukumseri in Lahaul and Spiti recorded the lowest night temperature at minus 8.6 degrees C.

The snow and rains have also brought cheers to the agriculturists and horticulturists as snow is considered as white manure for apples and rains are beneficial for the Rabi crop.

A dry spell had affected the Rabi crops in plain areas. *—PTI*

No respite from cold in J&K

SRINAGAR, 6 FEB

PHOTO: PTI

There was no respite from the intense cold wave conditions in Kashmir on Tuesday as the minimum temperatures stayed several degrees below freezing point at most places in the valley, a MeT department official said.

Pahalgam tourist resort in south Kashmir which serves as the base camp for the annual Amarnathyatra, recorded a low of minus 11. degrees Celsius and was the coldest recorded place in the valley last night.

The mercury in Gulmarg skiing resort in north Kashmir fell to minus 10.5 degrees Celsius from previous night's minus 10.0 degrees Celsius.

Kokernag and Qazigund towns in south Kashmir recorded a low of minus 2.4 degrees Celsius and minus 2.0 degrees Celsius respectively, the official said.

Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir, recorded a low of minus 2.4 degrees Celsius compared to previous night's minus 0.4 degrees Celsius.

As forecast, the weather improved in Kashmir on Tuesday morning as sun shone over the valley after nearly four days of overcast skies.

Although 'Chilla-i-Kalan' -- the 40-day harshest winter period -- ended earlier this week, the cold wave has continued in Kashmir.

The valley is currently going through a 20-day-long 'Chilla-i-Khurd' (small cold) which shall be followed by a 10-day 'Chilla-i-Bachha' (baby cold). *—PTI*

IN INDIA

'Covid led to rise in underweight kids'

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The percentage of underweight children increased from 31 per cent in 2017 to 45 per cent in 2021 ***PHOTO: PTI***

The disruption of India's food systems during the Covid-19 pandemic was associated with a steep rise in malnutrition among children as the lockdown impacted their nutritional status, according to a study.

Researchers from the Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition (TCI) in New Delhi analysed pre- and post-pandemic survey data on children's health and nutrition.

The study, published in the journal Economic and Political Weekly, found that the number of children deemed underweight increased by 14 per cent as a result of disruptions caused by the pandemic. These included supply chain disruptions, price inflation, loss of work and the interruption of government food safety net programme.

Previous TCI research on the impact of Covid-19 has found that supply chain disruptions caused food prices to increase and that women's dietary diversity worsened during the pandemic.

The team, including TCI researcher Payal Seth, examined survey data collected from 511 households in Bihar and Odisha in June 2017 and July 2021.

The researchers found that the percentage of underweight children increased from 31 per cent in 2017 to 45 per cent in 2021, with children under the age of 2 disproportionately impacted. Most of the shift occurred in children who already had a low weight for their age in 2017, they said.

The study shows a number of factors were behind a child's weight-for-age worsening. These included reduced access to food safety net programmes like Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and the Partnerships and Opportunities to Strengthen and Harmonize Actions for Nutrition (POSHAN) initiative or Mid-Day Meal Scheme.

Some of the children surveyed experienced an improvement in weight during the pandemic. Those children had higher access to ICDS and cultivated pulses and vegetables in 2021 than they did in 2017, the researchers said. *—PTI*

Islamic preacher faces 2nd FIR for hate speech

BHUJ, 6 FEB

Salman Azhari ***PHOTO: PTI***

Police in Gujarat registered a second FIR against Mumbai-based Islamic preacher Mufti Salman Azhari on Tuesday.

Azhari is under arrest, for allegedly delivering a provocative speech at a religious event at Samakhiyari in Kutch district.

Gujarat police had arrested the preacher from Mumbai for allegedly delivering a hate speech at an event held in an open ground near the 'B' division police station at Junagadh on 31, January, 2024 and was brought to Ahmedabad by a team of Gujrat Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS).

"Police permission was granted for the event, but the content of the speech was similar to that of the Junagadh event (held the same day)," Kutch (East)," said, Superintendent of Police, Sagar Bagmar.

As per Junagadh FIR, they had taken permission from police for the gathering stating that, Azhari will speak about religion and spread awareness on de-addiction. Instead, he made an inflammatory speech, said the police document.

After the video of his speech went viral, an FIR was registered against Azhari and local organizers of the event Mohammad Yousuf Malek and Azim Habib Odedara.

Azhari is booked under sections 153B (promoting enmity between different religious groups) and 505

Court to hear on survey of Gyanvapi 'secret cellars'

LUCKNOW, 6 FEB

A Varanasi court on Tuesday fixed 15 February for the hearing of a petition seeking a survey of all closed basements in the Gyanvapi mosque complex by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

According to the petition, there are "secret cellars" inside the basements and it is necessary to survey them to reveal the entire truth of the Gyanvapi mosque.

Lawyer Madan Mohan Yadav said acting District Judge Anil Kumar has fixed February 15 as the next date of hearing on the petition.

The petitioner, Rakhi Singh, is a founding member of the Vishwa Vedic SanatanSangh and is one of the parties in the MaaShringarGauri case, which led to the survey of the complex by the ASI. *—PTI*

CARNIVAL TREAT

A carnival float with a figure depicting Chinese President Xi Jinping in an electric car followed by a German in a "Flintstone" vehicle is presented during a press preview for the Mainz carnival in Mainz, Germany on Tuesday
PHOTO: PTI

Chinese ship's port call in Maldives fans tensions

The expected arrival of a Chinese research ship in the Maldives this week has escalated tensions between Beijing, Delhi and Male.

Officially, the vessel Xiang Yang Hong 3 is there to "make a port call, for rotation of personnel and replenishment".In short, an entirely innocuous stop.

But that is not how it is being seen in Delhi. Instead, the ship's presence is at the very least a diplomatic snub. At worst, some fear, it could be a mission to collect data which could - at a later date - be used by the Chinese military in submarine operations.

China experts, however, have shrugged off their concerns.

"The Chinese ships carry out scientific research work in the Indian ocean. Its activities on the high sea are entirely legitimate," Zhou Bo, a former People's Liberation Army Senior Colonel, said.

"Sometimes the ships need replenishment - like fuel, food and water. So, they berth in a third country port, which is normal. So, the Indian government shouldn't make any fuss about it. Indian Ocean is not India's Ocean," asserted Zhou, who is now with the Tsinghua University in Beijing.

But this is not the first time that China - which competes for influence with Delhi in the Indian Ocean amid a long-standing dispute over their Himalayan border - has sent one of its ships sailing close to Indian waters.

Minister Narendra Modi, China's President Xi Jinping during the 10th BRICS summit on 26 July, 2018

China and India compete for influence in the Indian Ocean amid a long-standing dispute over their Himalayan border

Two Chinese naval submarines made a port call to Colombo in 2014 and two Chinese research vessels visited Sri Lanka, close to the tip of southern India, in the past two years, much to the displeasure of India.

The arrivals came as China, which has loaned billions of dollars to Colombo, made significant inroads into Sri Lanka.

At worst, some fear, that it could be a mission to collect data which could - at a later date - be used by the Chinese military in submarine operations
PHOTO: EN.TIO.ORG.CN

The research ship, Xiang Yang Hong 3, had in fact originally planned to visit Colombo for replenishment before proceeding to the Maldives. But that has been shelved for now, according to Tharaka Balasuriya, the junior foreign minister of Sri Lanka.

"During this one year we want to develop our technology and expertise so that we can join in these research activities on an equal basis," he said.However, Colombo's decision to stop the research vessels is being seen as a response to India's strong objections to such visits by Chinese vessels.India's objections however, have made little difference in the Maldives. Maldives, which consists of about 1,200 coral islands and atolls in the middle of the Indian Ocean, has long been under India's sphere of influence. But Mohamed Muizzu, who took over as president in November and is regarded as pro-China, wants to change that.He campaigned on an 'India Out' platform, asking Delhi to withdraw about 80 Indian military personnel based on the island. India says the troops are in the island nation to maintain and operate three reconnaissance and rescue aircraft, donated by Delhi years ago. Maldivian government has set an ultimatum to Delhi to withdraw its troops by 15 March, two days before the country's parliamentary polls.

Following talks in Delhi last week, the Maldivian foreign ministry said India had agreed "to replace the military personnel" and that the first batch will leave by 10 March and the rest by the second week of May.

In December, Muizzu's administration also announced that it would not renew a hydrographic survey agreement with India that was signed by the previous government to map the seabed in the Maldivian territorial waters.But it is not just Delhi worried about the relationship with Male.

Opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and others have been urging Mr Muizzu's government for a course correction, saying it's not in the country's interests to antagonise a giant neighbour like India. Last week the MDP said it was even contemplating moving impeachment proceedings against Mr Muizzu. As a small island nation, the Maldives depends on India for most of its food, infrastructure building, and technological advancement. Many Maldivians go to India for medical treatment.

China has greater strategic ambitions and it's likely to send more ships to the Indian Ocean region for oceanographic research or to protect its commercial interests, experts say. For India, the challenge will be how to counter Beijing's growing assertive influence in an area that Delhi perceives as its backyard. Mr Zhou says Chinese aircraft carriers and their support vessels will eventually reach the Indian Ocean. If India disrupts restocking supplies for these ships in a third country - like Sri Lanka - then Beijing will be "furious", he says.

—BBC News

SALAR ساڈا

Bullied teens susceptible to psychosis, says study

The team found that bullying was associated with the teenagers experiencing preclinical stages of psychosis
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Bullied teenagers could exhibit higher chances of experiencing early stages of psychosis, a mental state characterised by being out of touch with reality, new study has found. Researchers scanned the brains of nearly 500 bullied teenagers and found lower levels of the neurotransmitter glutamate in the region known to be crucial to regulate emotions, the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC). Glutamate, usually the most abundant neurotransmitter, is involved in wide-ranging functions, including moderating moods.

The researchers at the University of Tokyo, Japan, also used questionnaires to track bullying victimisation in these adolescents and employed formal psychiatric measurement methods to assess their experiences.

The team found that bullying was associated with the teenagers experiencing preclinical stages of psychosis. They explained that these symptoms "come close" to psychosis, but do not meet the full criteria for a clinical diagnosis of psychotic disorders. Some of these disorders include schizophrenia and the manic state of bipolar disorder.

"Studying these subclinical psychotic experiences is important for us to understand the early stages of psychotic disorders and for identifying individuals who may be at increased risk for developing a clinical psychotic illness later on," said Naohiro Okada, project associate professor at the University of Tokyo's International Research Center for Neurointelligence and lead author of the study published in the journal Molecular Psychiatry.

While changes in glutamate levels have been implicated in various psychiatric disorders, the researchers said that the link between these changes in the ACC in individuals displaying higher risks of developing psychosis and the effects of bullying in teenagers was unclear.

For measuring the levels of the neurotransmitter glutamate, the team used magnetic resonance spectroscopy, or MRS, a type of radiological imaging applied to depict brain structure and function.

They also measured glutamate levels at a later point, allowing them to assess changes over time, and compare these changes to experiences with bullying or lack thereof, as well as with any intention on the part of those experiencing bullying to seek help.

"First and foremost, anti-bullying programs in schools that focus on promoting positive social interactions and reducing aggressive behaviours are essential for their own sake and to reduce the risk of psychosis and its subclinical precursors.

"These programs can help create a safe and supportive environment for all students, reducing the likelihood of bullying and its negative consequences," said Okada.

Other potential interventions like counselling services, peer support groups and other mental health resources can help adolescents cope with the negative effects of bullying and develop resilience, he said.

While Okada's group has identified a potential target of pharmacological interventions, he added that non-pharmacological interventions such as psychotherapy or mindfulness-based interventions may also serve to target this neurotransmitter imbalance.

—PTI

Potential interventions like counselling services, peer support groups and other mental health resources can help adolescents cope with the negative effects of bullying
PHOTO: PIXABAY

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

AI helps scholars decipher 2,000-year-old Roman scroll

A Roman scroll, partially preserved when it was buried in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79, has been virtually unwrapped and decoded using artificial intelligence.

The feat was achieved by three contestants in the Vesuvius Challenge, a competition launched in March 2023 in which people around the world raced to read the ancient Herculaneum papyri.

Papyrologists working with the Vesuvius Challenge believe the scroll contains "never-before-seen text from antiquity," and the text in question is a piece of Epicurean philosophy on the subject of pleasure. The winning submission shows ancient Greek letters on a large patch of scroll, and the author seems to be discussing the question: are things that are scarce more pleasurable as a result?The author, whose identity is unconfirmed, doesn't think so: "As too in the case of food, we do not right away believe things that are scarce to be absolutely more pleasant than those which are abundant," one passage from the scroll reads.

The three members of the winning team had previously individually made significant contributions to the competition. Luke Farritor, a computer science student at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Youssef Nader, a machine learning Ph.D. student at Freie University in Berlin, had been two of the first contestants to detect a smaller number of letters, winning $40,000 and $10,000 respectively. Julian Schilliger, a robotics student at ETH Zürich, developed a tool that began to automatically segment the scrolls. They will share the USD 700,000 grand prize.

Nat Friedman, a tech investor and executive, and one of the challenge's organizers, recently printed out the winning submission. "All this has been in this dreamlike digital world in my imagination before," Friedman says. "Seeing it on paper, rolling it up, it just made it so tangible."

There's a lot more to discover. The scroll partially decoded by the winning submission was one of 800 discovered in a southern Italian villa that was first uncovered in 1750. The combined efforts of the competitors and organizers so far have resulted in around 5 per cent of one scroll being read.

The scroll partially decoded by the winning submission was one of 800 discovered in a southern Italian villa that was first uncovered in 1750
PHOTO: TIME/ VESUVIUS CHALLENGE

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The final scramble to read the scrolls

Since the Vesuvius Challenge launched nearly a year ago, participants had both cooperated and competed, sharing their latest techniques with each other and posting pictures of their progress. But as the race for the grand prize intensified, the Discord, a social media platform where the participants shared information, went dark, says Friedman.Of the eighteen submissions for the grand prize, most of them were received on the last day of the contest, Dec. 31, and three were sent in the final ten minutes, according to Friedman. Friedman recalls he was at home with his family around Christmas, decorating for the holiday while compulsively refreshing his phone, when the winning submission came in. "I ran into my little office at home and popped it open," he says. "I was like, 'Wow, this is really magnificent.'"In accordance with the criteria set in March 2023, the winning submission contains four passages of 140 characters each, with at least 85% of the characters in each of those passages recoverable by professional papyrologists. It also contains a further 11 columns of text.It isn't known who authored the ancient scroll, but experts have developed theories. "Is the author Epicurus' follower, the philosopher and poet Philodemus, the teacher of Vergil? It seems very likely," writes Richard Janko, professor of classical studies at the University of Michigan. "Is he writing about the effect of music on the hearer, and comparing it to other pleasures like those of food and drink? Quite probably." Robert Fowler, a professor of Greek at the University of Bristol, also believes the author to be Philodemus. "Like other Epicureans, he valued pleasure above all - but pleasure rightly understood, not mere indulgence," Fowler writes of the philosopher.In the final section of the scroll, the author appears to criticize his intellectual adversaries, who "have nothing to say about pleasure, either in general or in particular, when it is a question of definition."

—Courtesy, Time

Sri Lanka reserves money to hold major elections

COLOMBO, 6 FEB

The cash-strapped Sri Lankan government has reserved Rs 10 billion to hold the two major elections, including the presidential election this year. A Cabinet note on the two major elections - the Presidential and parliamentary polls - came as no action has been taken to hold the local council elections postponed since March of last year. The Cabinet note released after Monday's meeting said: "The Cabinet of Ministers considered that an allocation of rupees 10 billion has been made by the budget estimated for the year 2024, within the financial stamina of the government and those provisions have to be managed for covering the expenditure of the Presidential election and general election". The local election to appoint over 300 local councils was postponed as the government did not release the funds citing the economic crisis mitigation measures taken at the time. *—PTI*

PHOTO: AP

Protests erupt as Haitians demand PM's resignation

PORT-AU-PRINCE, 6 FEB

Protests shut down major cities in Haiti on Monday as demonstrators clashed with police and demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry. Banks, schools and government agencies closed in Haiti's northern and southern regions while protesters blocked main routes with blazing tires and paralysed public transportation, according to local media reports. In Hinche, a city in Haiti's central region, protesters celebrated the arrival of heavily armed state environmental agents and their commander, Joseph Jean Baptiste, who demanded that Henry resign. "I want Ariel to stand in front of my bullets, so they go through him," the commander said as someone filmed him while the crowd cheered. "We're the ones who have the support of the population," he said. *—AP*

Miss Japan Shiino steps down after backlash

TOKYO, 6 FEB

The Ukraine-born winner of the Miss Japan beauty pageant has given up her crown after a tabloid report revealed her affair with a married man. Karolina Shiino, 26, was crowned Miss Japan two weeks ago but her win sparked public debate due to her heritage. While some welcomed the naturalised citizen's crowning, others said she didn't represent traditional Japanese beauty ideals. Amid the furore, a local magazine published an expose alleging an affair. The article in the Shukan Bunshun reported that Ms Shiino had engaged in a relationship with a married influencer and doctor. The man has not provided any public comment. In its initial response to the report last week, the pageant organisers defended Shiino, saying she hadn't known the man was married. *—BBC News*

Indian origin man fined for molesting crew in Singapore

SINGAPORE, 6 FEB

A 42-year-old Indian-origin singer was fined 3,000 Singaporean dollars for molesting a female freelance production crew member after a show at the Mediacorp Campus in Singapore, according to a media report on Tuesday. Two other charges, including one more molestation charge, were considered during the sentencing of Sivabalan Siva Prasad Menon, who had consumed up to 15 cups of whisky before molesting the female in 2022, The Straits Times reported. The woman cannot be named due to a gag order and details about the show were not disclosed in court documents. The report had also not disclosed the exact date when the crime took place to protect the victim's identity. *—PTI*

Yemen Houthi rebel drone attacks ship in Red Sea

The private security firm identified the vessel as an UK-owned cargo ship

TEL AVIV, 6 FEB

A ship travelling through the southern Red Sea was attacked by a suspected Yemen Houthi rebel drone early Tuesday, authorities said, the latest assault in their campaign targeting vessels over Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

The attack happened west of Hodeida, Yemen, and the projectile caused "slight damage" to the vessel's windows on the bridge, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations said. A small vessel had been nearby the ship before the attack, it added.

The private security firm Ambrey identified the vessel as a Barbados-flagged, United Kingdom-owned cargo ship. No one was hurt onboard the vessel, which suffered "minor damage," the firm said.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

However, suspicions immediately fell on the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen. Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas.

But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperilling shipping in a key route for trade among Asia, the Mideast and Europe.

In recent weeks, the US and the United Kingdom, backed by other allies, have launched airstrikes targeting Houthi missile arsenals and launch sites for its attacks.

The US and Britain struck 36 Houthi targets in Yemen on Saturday. An air assault Friday in Iraq and Syria targeted other Iranian-backed militias and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in retaliation for a drone strike that killed three US troops in Jordan.

The US military's Central Command separately acknowledged an attack Monday on the Houthis, in which they attacked what they described as two Houthi drone boats loaded with explosives. *—AP*

The private security firm Ambrey identified the vessel as a Barbados-flagged, United Kingdom-owned cargo ship
PHOTO: X/ANADOLU ENGLISH

Russia, China slam US for Middle East strikes

MOSCOW, 6 FEB

Russia and China have slammed the United States for its recent air strikes on targets in Iraq and Syria.

The two countries accused Washington of raising the risk of regional escalation at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council late on Monday. Moscow also asserted that the US decision to launch the attacks was linked to the upcoming presidential election in November.

Russia, whose invasion of Ukraine has been the topic of bitter debate at the UNSC over the past two years, had requested the council meeting after the US launched dozens of strikes against Iran-aligned targets in Iraq and Syria. The attacks followed a drone strike on a US base in Jordan.

Moscow's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia alleged that the strikes were a US attempt to "flex its muscles". *—Courtesy, Al Jazeera*

Senegal unstable after polls are postponed

LAGOS, 6 FEB

PHOTO: K24 TV

- Thierno Alassane Sall, a candidate, also no relation, called it "high treason" and urged his supporters to gather in front of the National Assembly to protest

Senegal's reputation as a bastion of democracy in an unstable region is on the line as protesters clash with police outside the National Assembly.

Inside, lawmakers have passed a contentious bill to extend President Macky Sall's tenure and delay elections after he called off a planned election with just three weeks to go. Khalifa Sall, a leading opponent and a former mayor of Dakar, who is not related to the president, called the delay a "constitutional coup" and urged people to protest against it. His political coalition has vowed to go to court.

Thierno Alassane Sall, another candidate, also no relation, called it "high treason" and urged his supporters to gather in front of the National Assembly to protest and "remind MPs to stand on the right side of history".

The proposal needed the support of three-fifths (i.e. 99) of the 165 deputies to pass. The ruling Benno Bokk Yakaar coalition, of which President Sall's Alliance for the Republic party is part, has a slight majority in parliament. There was a heated atmosphere in the chamber, and it was reported that some opposition MPs had been removed by security forces after they tried to block proceedings. In the end 105 MPs voted for the proposal. A six-month postponement was originally proposed, but a last-minute amendment extended it to 10 months, or 15 December.

Sall reiterated that he was not planning to run for office again. But his critics accuse him of either trying to cling on to power or unfairly influencing whoever succeeds him.

—BBC News

8 FEBRUARY POLLS

Pakistan campaigning takes pause

A police officer stands guard as a workers prepare ballot boxes before dispatching them to polling stations in, Pakistan, on Tuesday PHOTO: PTI

ISLAMABAD, 6 FEB

Pakistan's electioneering would end Tuesday night for a mandatory cool-down period ahead of the 8 February polls to let the voters think deeply before exercising their franchise for their favourite candidates at the national and provincial legislatures.

According to election rules, the campaigning would end at the stroke of midnight between February 6 and 7, meaning no political rally is allowed and candidates can only use closed-door meetings and face-to-face contact with the voters. As per the rules, those violating the law may face imprisonment of up to two years.

Ahead of the mandatory moratorium, all major parties have plans for using the last day to hold rallies across the country with top leaders like Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, Shehbaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Asif Ali Zardari, Maulana Fazlur Reham and other addressing rallies in various cities.

The triangular contest involves the Pakistan Muslims League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of imprisoned Imran Khan. Due to the absence of former prime minister Khan, who is in jail after being convicted of corruption charges, the PTI's fate is difficult to gauge at this point but it may still stage an upset.

But several smaller parties with sizeable vote banks, including the Mutahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan, the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Fazl, the Awami National Party, the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-e-Azam, the Balochistan National Party are also poised to make gains and play a role in case no major winner emerges.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) announced that it had delivered more than 260 million ballot papers across the country despite time constraints and weather-related challenges. Delivery of ballot papers has started to the respective returning officers, who have been tasked with preparing packets for delivery to the concerned presiding officers a day before polling. *—PTI*

Imran Khan's party candidate contesting against Sharif indicted

LAHORE, 6 FEB

A Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed woman candidate contesting against PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif here was indicted in a terrorism case on Tuesday, as authorities in Pakistan's Punjab province intensified crackdown on jailed former premier Imran Khan's party leaders and supporters ahead of elections. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) candidates are contesting the 8 February polls independently after the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Election Commission of Pakistan to deprive Khan's party of its iconic election symbol 'bat'. Since the PTI is facing the wrath of the military establishment, its independent candidates are not being allowed to campaign in their constituencies, thus paving the way for the PMLN, which is currently the blue-eyed of the military, to win the election. *—PTI*

Blinken's return to Mideast for postwar plan face obstacles

RIYADH, 6 FEB

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Saudi Arabia's crown prince the start of his fifth visit to the Middle East since the outbreak of the war in Gaza on Monday.

He was hoping to press ahead with a potential cease-fire deal and postwar planning while tamping down regional tensions.

But on all three fronts he faces major challenges: Hamas and Israel are publicly at odds over key elements of a potential truce. Israel has dismissed the United States' calls for a path to a Palestinian state, and Iran's militant allies in the region have shown little sign of being deterred by US strikes.

In Gaza, Hamas has begun to re-emerge in some of the most devastated areas after Israeli forces pulled back, an indication that Israel's central goal of crushing the group remains elusive.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant said, military would continue to conduct operations in Northern Gaza for many months and press ahead with its main offensive in the south, where it has been locked in heavy fighting for weeks, until it has "full reign" over the entire territory. *—AP*

The military stepped up airstrikes after the three ethnic minority armed groups launched a major offensive in October PHOTO: AP

UN asks Myanmar's army to halt strikes

UNITED NATIONS, 6 FEB

Nine members of the United Nations Security Council condemned "indiscriminate" airstrikes by Myanmar's military on Monday.

This is against civilians before an envoy briefed the council, as part of regional efforts to implement a peace plan that has so far been largely ineffective.

The plan, adopted in April 2021 shortly after military seized power in a takeover that sparked a civil war, calls for the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by a special envoy from Association of Southeast Asian Nations, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels, and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all concerned parties.

The military leadership in Myanmar has so far ignored the plan, and violence and the humanitarian crisis in the country have been growing at a rapid pace.

The military stepped up airstrikes after the three ethnic minority armed groups launched a major offensive in late October, seizing towns in the country's northeast, along with major border crossings for trade with China.

The nine council members — Ecuador, France, Japan, Malta, South Korea, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States — said that, three years after the military takeover, more than 18 million people need humanitarian aid and 2.6 million remain displaced. *—PTI*

THOUSANDS STUCK IN CHINA AS SNOW SNARLS LUNAR NEW YEAR TRAVEL

BEIJING, 6 FEB

Icy conditions trapped thousands of motorists on highways in central China as snow and freezing rain snarled travel by air, train and road during the annual Lunar New Year holiday rush.

A Chinese travel blogger said she and her boyfriend were waiting with others Tuesday for de-icing work to be completed after covering only 30 to 40 kilometres (20 to 25 miles) in 13 hours the previous day.

Traveling in the relative comfort of a motorhome, Chen Wei appeared unperturbed by the delay in the trip to her hometown. She quoted an old Chinese saying, telling the AP she "accepts what comes and faces it with calmness."

The heavy snow, unusual for central China, was forecast to continue into Wednesday. Millions of people are heading home for the Lunar New Year, which falls on Saturday. Families traditionally gather for dinner the night before.

The central government in Beijing said it would disburse 141 million yuan in urgent assistance for highway snow removal and related work in 11 provinces to ensure safe travel for the holiday, state broadcaster CCTV reported. In Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, tree branches snapped under the weight of the snow and the airport closed runways because of icy conditions. Some flights and trains were cancelled or delayed, stranding travellers for hours.

A provincial emergency management official told CCTV that 4,000 vehicles were stuck on Monday because of icy conditions. There was no immediate update to that figure on Tuesday. *—AP*

HUNDREDS MISSING

Forest fires kill 123 in Chile's worst disaster since 2010 earthquake

SANTIAGO, 6 FEB

Volunteers in central Chile tried to remove charred metal, broken glass and other debris Monday from neighborhoods devastated by wildfires over the past several days, as officials raised the death toll to 123. Hundreds of people remain missing.

The fires appeared to have diminished by Monday morning after burning intensely since Friday on the eastern edge of the city of Viña del Mar. Two other towns in the Valparaíso region, Quilpé and Villa Alemana, also have been hit hard, and President Gabriel Boric said Sunday that at least 3,000 homes had been burnt down in the area. An additional 10 victims were added to the death toll on Monday afternoon, said Marisol Prado, the director of Chile's Forensic Medical Service.

Prado said that many bodies were in bad condition and difficult to identify, but added that forensic workers would be taking samples of genetic material from people who have reported missing relatives.

Viña del Mar's Mayor Macarena Ripamonti said that at least 370 people have been reported missing in the city of about 300,000 residents.

The fires ravaged several neighbourhoods that had been precariously built on the mountains that loom to the east of Viña del Mar, which is also a popular beach resort.

Officials have suggested Vthat some of the wildfires around the city could have been intentionally provoked. Dry weather, strong winds and low humidity helped the fires spread faster, Boric said. *—AP*

At least 3,000 homes had been burnt down in alparaíso region, Quilpé and Villa Alemana PHOTO: AP

Cancer charities prompted King Charles go public with diagnosis

LONDON, 6 FEB

Britain's King Charles III chose to make his cancer diagnosis public in keeping with his role as patron of cancer charities when he was the Prince of Wales, Buckingham Palace has said.

The palace announced on Monday evening that the 75-year-old monarch had begun a schedule of treatment and remains "wholly positive" after being diagnosed with an unspecified form of cancer. It stressed that while the "issue of concern" came to light during his recent hospital treatment for a benign prostate enlargement, the King "does not have prostate cancer".

"The King has elected to make his diagnosis public once the schedule of treatment had begun, noting that as Prince of Wales, he was a patron of a number of cancer-related charities," said a palace spokesperson.

"In this capacity, His Majesty has often spoken publicly in support of cancer patients, their loved ones and the wonderful health professionals who help care for them," the spokesperson said.

Wishes for King Charles' health have been pouring in from leaders around the world, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi who wished him a "speedy recovery and good health". UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told BBC he was "shocked and sad" to hear of the King's cancer diagnosis but thankful the illness was "caught early".

"All our thoughts are with him and his family. I'm in regular contact as I always am," said Sunak, indicating his customary weekly audiences with the King will continue during the treatment.

Buckingham Palace said in an official statement that it was during the King's recent hospital procedure for benign prostate enlargement, a separate issue of concern was noted and subsequent diagnostic tests have identified a form of cancer.

The monarch has commenced a schedule of regular treatments, during which time he has been advised by doctors to postpone public-facing duties. However, he will continue to undertake State business and official paperwork as usual. *—PTI*

Timeline of King Charles treatment

17 Jan
King Charles is set to attend hospital for Prostrate treatment

18 Jan- Queen Camlia announces that' King is fine'

19 Jan- King Charles flies back to his Sandringham estate to rest

25 Jan- Meeting with the academics from Cambridge University before treatment

26 Jan- King Charles received his prostate treatment

29 Jan- King leaves the hospital and Palace to postpone his public engagements.

31 Jan- Queen informs that King is 'doing his best' post treatment

4 Feb- King's 1st public outing post treatment to Sandringham church

5 Feb- Buckingham Palace announces King's cancer condition

Rupee settles 2 paise lower at 83.05 against USD

MUMBAI, 6 FEB

The rupee declined 2 paise to close at 83.05 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, amid a firm American currency against major currencies overseas. However, positive sentiment in the domestic equity markets and lower global crude prices supported the domestic unit, forex analysts said.Investors were cautious as the Reserve Bank's monetary policy committee (MPC), the six-member rate-setting panel, began the deliberation on Tuesday. The central bank will announce the key interest rate decision on Thursday.At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 83.03 against the dollar and touched the intra-day low of 83.06 against the greenback. The local unit finally settled at 83.05 (provisional) against the US currency, registering a loss of 2 paise from the previous day. The rupee settled 5 paise lower at 83.03 against the dollar on Monday. *—PTI*

Gold falls ₹150; silver tumbles ₹600

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Gold prices fell Rs 150 to Rs 63,200 per 10 grams in the national capital on Tuesday amid bearish cues from the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities.Gold had closed at Rs 63,350 per 10 grams in the previous close. Silver also tumbled Rs 600 to Rs 74,900 per kilogram, while it had settled at Rs 75,500 per kg in the previous trade."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,200 per 10 grams, down by Rs 150, taking bearish cues from the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.In global markets, gold and silver were trading lower at USD 2,022 per ounce and USD 22.32 per ounce, respectively. *—PTI*

TVS Supply Chain Solutions posts Q3 PAT at ₹10 crore

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The Global supply chain solutions provider had posted a consolidated PAT at Rs 17.2 crore, during the corresponding quarter of last year.Revenue from operations during the quarter under review on consolidated basis stood at Rs 2,221.8 crore, as compared to Rs 2,373.4 crore registered in the year ago period.TVS Supply Chain Solutions Ltd for the nine months ended December 31, 2023 posted a net loss of Rs 63.10 crore, as compared to a profit after tax at Rs 57.02 crore, registered in the same period of last year.Total income on a consolidated basis for the nine months ended December 31,2023 slipped to Rs 6,821.77 crore, from Rs 7,737.48 crore, registered in the corresponding period of last year."Our Q3 performance highlights the inherent strength of our business portfolio. We have been able to grow both revenues and margins consistently to help drive consolidated margins YoY (year-on-year)" said company Managing Director Ravi Viswanathan.| *—PTI*

L&T bags project to construct bridge across Brahmaputra

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Tuesday said it has bagged a large project to construct a bridge across the Brahmaputra in Assam. As per L&T classification, contracts worth Rs 2,500-5,000 crore fall in the category of large orders."The transportation infrastructure business of L&T Construction has won a project contract, to construct the Palashbari to Sualkuchi cable-stayed bridge across the river Brahmaputra in Assam," the company said in a filing to BSE. The project has been awarded by Public Works Roads Department (PwRD), Assam.The 12.21-km bridge will directly connect Palashbari and Sualkuchi towns. Sualkuchi is one of the world's largest weaving centres where traditional Assamese garments are made with indigenous materials like Muga. *—PTI*

India & Qatar sign $78 B pact for LNG imports

Deal is priced at 12.67% of prevailing Brent crude oil price

GOA, 6 FEB

India on Tuesday signed a USD 78 billion deal to extend LNG imports from Qatar by another 20 years till 2048 at rates lower than current prices.

Petronet LNG Ltd, India's biggest liquefied natural gas (LNG) importer, in a statement said it has signed a pact with QatarEnergy to extend the deal to buy 7.5 million tonne a year of gas for producing electricity, making fertilizers and converting it into CNG.

The deal was signed on the sidelines of India Energy Week (IEW) here.

Sources said the renewal is at a "significantly" lower price than the current deal. At current prices, India will save about USD 0.8 per million British thermal unit at the renewed terms. This translates into savings of USD 6 billion over the contract period.

Petronet imports 8.5 million tonne per annum (MTPA) of LNG from Qatar under two contracts. The first 25-year deal is to expire in 2028 and has now been extended for 20 additional years. The second deal for 1 MTPA entered into in 2015, will be negotiated separately, sources said.

The deal was signed for next 20 years till 2048 at rates lower than current prices *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

As per the 1999 deal for 7.5 MTPA, the renewal was to be agreed upon five years prior to the end of the supply term. That deadline was in December 2023

The two sides were engaged in intense negotiations over the last few months. There were heightened tensions when a Qatar court sentenced eight former Indian Navy officials to death in October for allegedly spying for Israel. At December-end, their sentence was reduced.

Qatar's energy Minister and top officials of QatarEnergy are attending the IEW here.

India, the world's third biggest energy consumer, sees natural gas as a transition fuel for migrating to net zero carbon emissions by 2070. As part of this, the government is targeting to raise the share of natural gas in the country's energy mix to 15 per cent by 2030 from 6.3 per cent now.

Sources said the current deal is priced at 12.67 per cent of prevailing Brent crude oil price plus a fixed component of USD 0.52 per million British thermal unit.

Under the new contract, the slope would remain more or less the same but the fixed charge of USD 0.52 would be scrapped, they said. *—PTI*

NIFTY GOES UP BY 0.72%

Sensex rebounds 454 points on IT shares

MUMBAI, 6 FEB

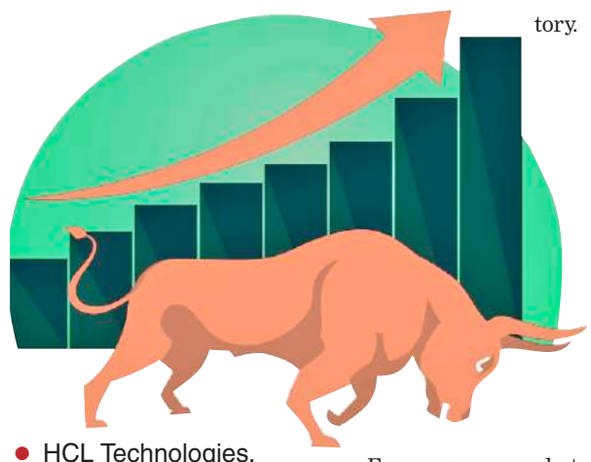
Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded nearly 1 per cent on Tuesday following buying in IT giants TCS and Infosys and fresh foreign fund inflows.

After a firm beginning, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 454.67 points or 0.63 per cent to settle at 72,186.09. During the day, it jumped 529.98 points or 0.73 per cent to 72,261.40.

The Nifty went up by 157.70 points or 0.72 per cent to 21,929.40.

Among the Sensex firms, HCL Technologies, Tata Consultancy Services, Maruti, Wipro, Larsen & Toubro, Infosys, Tata Steel, Bharti Airtel, State Bank of India, Tech Mahindra, UltraTech Cement and Mahindra & Mahindra were the major gainers.

Bharti Airtel climbed over 2 per cent after the company on Monday posted a 54 per cent jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 2,442.2 crore for the December quarter, mainly on account of growth in high-value customers.



HCL Technologies, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Tata Steel, State Bank of India, were the major gainers

Power Grid, IndusInd Bank, ITC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bajaj Finserv and Axis Bank were among the laggards.In Asian markets, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with smart gains while Seoul and Tokyo ended in the negative territory.

European markets were trading mostly in the green. The US markets ended lower on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 518.88 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark declined by 354.21 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 71,731.42 on Monday. The Nifty fell by 82.10 points or 0.38 per cent to close at 21,771.70. *—PTI*

Three IPOs to hit primary market, to raise ₹1,700cr

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The IPO lane is getting busy with three entities -- Rashi Peripherals, Jana Small Finance Bank and Capital Small Finance Bank-- set to float their maiden public issues on Wednesday to collectively mobilise around Rs 1,700 crore.

Of the IPO proceeds, funds worth Rs 326 crore will be utilised for payment of debt and Rs 220 crore for funding working capital requirements and general corporate purposes.

Private equity majors TPG and Morgan Stanley-backed Jana Small Finance Bank's issue consists of primary share sale of Rs 462 crore at the upper end of the price band and the remaining Rs 108 crore as offer for sale. The price band has been set at Rs 393-414 apiece for its Rs 570-crore IPO.The Bengaluru-headquartered bank will use the money from the fresh issue to augment its core capital to meet future capital requirements and improve its capital adequacy ratio.

The Rs 523-crore IPO of Capital Small Finance Bank is a combination of fresh issue of shares worth Rs 450 crore and an OFS of Rs 73 crore through which promoters and external investors will dilute 5 per cent of their pre-issue holdings.

To grow its loan portfolio and asset base, it expects to require additional capital. *—PTI*

HDFC Bank to acquire stake in ICICI

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

HDFC Bank on Tuesday said RBI has given approval to the group to acquire up to 9.5 per cent stake each in six lenders, including ICICI Bank and Axis Bank. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) gave its approval on February 5, 2024. Entities under HDFC Bank Group are HDFC Mutual Fund, HDFC Life Insurance Company, HDFC ERGO General Insurance Company and others.

PHOTO: PTI

"The approvals were granted pursuant to applications made by HDFC Bank (as a promoter/ sponsor of the Group) to RBI on 18 December, 2023," HDFC Bank said in a regulatory filing. The six lenders in which HDFC Bank will take stake are — Axis Bank, Suryoday Small Finance Bank, ICICI Bank, Bandhan Bank, Yes Bank, and IndusInd Bank. The RBI's approval is valid for a period of one year till 4 February, 2025, it said.As per RBI directions, HDFC Bank will have to ensure that the aggregate holding in the 6 banks does not exceed 9.50 per cent of the paid up share capital or voting rights of the respective banks, at all times. "In view of the same, whilst HDFC Bank does not intend to invest in these banks, since the "aggregate holding" of HDFC Bank Group, was likely to exceed the prescribed limit of 5 per cent, an application seeking approval of RBI for increase in investment limits was made," it said. HDFC made the application to RBI on behalf of the group, it said. *—PTI*

MEET-UPS

Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani and his wife Priti Adani with former Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull, his wife Lucy Turnbull on his visit to Gujarat's Khavda on Tuesday where Adani Group is building world's largest 30 GW Hybrid Renewables Park *PHOTO: X/ GAUTAM ADANI*

Omega Seiki ties up with Attero for battery recycling

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Omega Seiki Private Ltd (OSPL) on Tuesday announced it has signed an agreement with Attero for recycling of lithium-ion batteries. Under the collaboration, OSPL, along with e-waste management firm Attero, plans to recycle over 100MWh of batteries in the next 3-4 years, OSPL said in a statement.

Besides the domestic market, the strategic alliance between OSPL and Attero will also cover the ASEAN and African regions, it stated.

With over 10,000 OSM (Omega Seiki Mobility) brand electric vehicles currently in operation, Attero will play a key role in repurposing the batteries for energy storage, aligning with the efforts of both entities to address the complete lifecycle of EV components and ensure responsible EV battery solutions, the statement said.

According to OSPL, Attero currently has a facility capable of processing 1,45,000 metric tonnes of e-waste and 11,000 metric tonnes of battery waste annually. The company said it plans to deploy EV batteries totalling over 1-GWH in the next five years, accompanied by a collective target with Attero to recycle over 100 MWh of batteries in the next 3-4 years.

" With EV production on the rise, it is becoming critical for India to have a sustainable approach to recycling lithium-ion batteries. The improper disposal of Li-ion battery recycling is not only an environmental threat but also a wasted opportunity to extract rare materials," said Nitin Gupta, Co-founder, Attero. *—PTI*

The strategic alliance between OSPL and Attero will also cover the ASEAN and African regions, it stated

PAYTM SHARES REBOUND AFTER 3 DAYS OF FALL

MUMBAI, 6 FEB

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns Paytm brand, rebounded on Tuesday after three days of sharp fall.The stock jumped 7.79 per cent to Rs 472.50 during the day on the BSE despite a weak beginning to the trade. It ended at Rs 451.60 apiece, reflecting a gain of 3.02 per cent.Shares of the company climbed 7.99 per cent to Rs 473.55 during the day on the NSE and ended at Rs 452.80 each, up 3.26 per cent.Recovery in the stock added Rs 852.78 crore to its market capitalisation (mcap), which stood at Rs 28,680.23 crore.

In the past three days, the company's stock tumbled over 42 per cent, wiping out Rs 20,471.25 crore from its market valuation, following the RBI's crackdown.

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd had hit its lower circuit limit on Monday. *—PTI*

FMCG industry records 6.4% growth: NielsenIQ

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Indian FMCG industry's volume grew by 6.4 per cent in October-December quarter with an uptick in consumption that was seen both in urban and rural area, says NielsenIQ report.

The report also highlighted a narrowing consumption gap between urban and rural markets for the first time in 2023. North and West regions are contributing to this phenomenon.

In 2024, Indian fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is poised to register a growth between 4.5 per cent and 6.5 per cent, on the basis of the strength of the sector and Indian economy.

In rural markets, there is a sequential slowdown in volume growth, with consumption experiencing a slight decline during this quarter (Q4'23) compared to Q3'23. However, the decline is more pronounced in urban markets. "In Q4'23, we observe an uptick in consumption, primarily driven by habit-forming categories (such as biscuits and noodles) in food and essential home products. These categories have thrived despite flat to negative price growth, indicating resilience and sustained demand," added Roosevelt Dsouza, NIQ Head of Customer Success - IndiaWithin the retail sector, FMCG sales from modern trade channels continue to experience double-digit consumption growth at 16.8 per cent in the fourth quarter.

The report highlighted a narrowing consumption gap between urban and rural markets for the first time in 2023 *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

In non-food categories, there is an improvement, with volume growth reaching 9.6 per cent in Q4'23 compared to the last year, an increase from the 8.7 per cent. This improvement can be attributed to an increase in rural consumption growth.Volume growth is attributed to home care (washing powder) and personal care (toilet soaps) categories in rural areas.In urban areas, non-food sector is witnessing slower consumption growth, with a growth rate of 9.4 per cent in the December quarter. *—PTI*

GOVT INITIATIVE

2,200 fraudulent loan apps removed

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The government on Tuesday informed Parliament that Google has suspended or removed more than 2,200 fraudulent loan apps from its Play Store between September 2022 and August 2023.The government is constantly engaged with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other regulators and stakeholders concerned to control fraudulent loan apps, Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat K Karad said in a written reply to Rajya Sabha.

"As per the information received from MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology), during April 2021-July 2022, Google had reviewed approximately 3,500 to 4,000 loan apps and suspended/removed over 2,500 loan apps from its Play Store," he said.

Similarly, he said, during September 2022-August 2023, over 2,200 loan apps were removed from the Google Play Store.

"Further, Google has updated its policy regarding enforcement of loan apps on the Play Store and only those apps are allowed on the Play Store which are published by Regulated Entities (REs) or those working in partnership with REs. It has also deployed additional policy requirements with strict enforcement actions for loan apps in India," he said.

The Reserve Bank has issued regulatory guidelines on digital lending, which aims at firming up the regulatory framework for digital lending, while enhancing customer protection and making the digital lending ecosystem safe and sound, he said.

RBI have also been taking cybercrime awareness campaigns through dissemination of messages through SMS *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

JanSamarth Portal was launched to provide a common platform for availing loans under credit-linked government schemes.

In order to facilitate the citizens to report cyber incidents, including illegal loan apps, he said, MHA has launched a National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (www.cybercrime.gov.in) as well as a National Cybercrime Helpline number '1930'.

To spread awareness against cybercrimes, he said, the government has been taking various initiatives from time to time which include cyber safety tips through social media accounts, publishing of handbook for adolescents/students, publishing of 'Information Security Best practices' for the benefit of government officials, organising cyber safety and security awareness weeks in association with states/Union Territories etc.

In addition to these, he said, RBI and banks have also been taking cybercrime awareness campaigns through dissemination of messages on cybercrime through SMS (Short Messaging Service), radio campaigns, and publicity on prevention of 'cybercrime'.

In a reply to another question, Karad said, JanSamarth Portal was launched to provide a common platform for availing loans under credit-linked government schemes. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Mayank returns to lead K'taka against TN in Ranji Trophy

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Karnataka captain Mayank Agarwal who was recently hospitalised after drinking a suspicious liquid on-board a flight has recovered and will return to lead his team against Tamil Nadu in its next Ranji Trophy Group C match in Chennai from Friday.The 32-year-old batter had consumed the liquid on board his team's flight to Surat after the match against Tripura last month. Agarwal went on to file an FIR alleging foul play. He consequently missed Karnataka's last engagement against Railways.However, he was cleared of any major health issues by the doctors here paving the way for his comeback to the team. Promising batter Nikin Jose had led Karnataka against Railways in the absence of Agarwal and the former champions eked out a nervy one-wicket win at Surat with veteran Manish Pandey making an unbeaten fifty.—*PTI*

PHOTO: AP

Lionel Messi hopes to play in Tokyo friendly

TOKYO, 6 FEB

Look for Lionel Messi to play in Wednesday's friendly in Tokyo with Inter Miami facing Japanese club Vissel Kobe.And don't look for another public-relations disaster as happened on Sunday when Argentina's World Cup-winning captain sat on the bench for the entire match against a selection of players from the Hong Kong league, angering thousands of fans who demanded refunds. Teammate Luis Suarez another big name on the club also remained on the bench.—*AP*

Jordan stuns South Korea to enter final for the first time

QATAR, 6 FEB

Goals from Yazan Al-Naimat and Musa Al-Tamaari saw Jordan beat title favorite South Korea 2-0 to march into its first AFC Asian Cup final, at the Ahmed bin Ali Stadium here on Tuesday. Reigning champion Qatar is hosting this tournament and it's pretty hot there in the summer. So it's been moved to winter, where the Qataris will hope to repeat after claiming their first-ever Asian Cup when UAE hosted in 2019. They'll have to deal with some major powers with big-name stars, as Japan, South Korea, Iran, and Australia are all top-25 teams in FIFA's Rankings.—*AP*

PHOTO: AP

Fabian Allen attacked, robbed at gunpoint

DURBAN, 6 FEB

According to the report from Cricbuzz, West Indies all-rounder Fabian Allen was attacked and robbed at gunpoint outside the Paarl Royals team hotel in Johannesburg.it was also stated that the 28-year-old all-rounder was attacked by the assailants, armed with a gun, near the renowned Sandton Sun Hotel. Allen's phone and personal belongings, including a bag, were also forcibly taken away."Our head coach Andre Coley, also hailing from Jamaica, reached out to Fabian. Contact was successfully established through Obed McCoy (another West Indies international). He is fine.—AP

Dhas, Saharan fifties give India two-wicket win over SA

Under-19 World Cup: India enter 5th consecutive final

India captain Uday Saharan and Sachin Dhas stitched a match-winning 171-run stand for the fifth wicket **PHOTO: AP**

BENONI, 6 FEB

Defending champions India snatched victory from the jaws of defeat to storm into the ICC U-19 World Cup final for a fifth consecutive time, defeating hosts South Africa by two wickets in a thrilling semi-final in Benoni on Tuesday.Sachin Dhas (96) and skipper Uday Saharan (81) struck half-centuries and stitched a 171-run fifth-wicket partnership to help the 'Colts in Blue' recover from 32/4 after they were set a competitive 245-run target by the junior Proteas. Seamer Raj Limbai would not only star with the ball with a haul of 3/60, but he would also hit the winning boundary as India chased the target down with more than an over to spare.

But the beginning of India's chase resembled a debris yard, losing four wickets for just 32 runs in the 12th over.

The South African new-ball bowler Kwena Maphaka jolted India in the first ball of their innings, dismissing Adarsh Singh with a nasty climbing delivery that the batter had no choice other than snicking to wicket-keeper Lhuan-dre Pretorious.

His partner Tristan Luus soon joined the fun with the wickets of Musheer Khan, Arshin Kulkarni, and Priyanshu Moliya as all three India batters were indecisive outside the off-stump while hanging their bats to dry.

But the Indians found their saviors in Dhas and Saharan, who dished out innings of vastly contrasting nature and tempo.

Dhas was aggressive despite the situation his team was in, but Saharan was happy to keep his end going.

Brief Scores:
South Africa 244/7 in 50 overs (Lhuan-dre Pretorious 76, Richard Seletswane 64; Raj Limbani 3/60) lost to India 248 for 8 in in 48.5 overs (Sachin Dhas 96, Uday Saharan 81; Kwena Maphaka 3/32, Tristan Luus 3/37) by two wickets.
—*AP*

There is a lot of work to be done: Zaheer on India's batting

VISAKHAPATNAM, 6 FEB

Former India pacer Zaheer Khan has highlighted the host's batting frailties in the ongoing series against England saying it was only because of the individual brilliance of Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubman Gill that India won the second Test.Indian batters didn't fire as a collective unit in the second Test as the home side rode on opener Jaiswal's first innings of 209 and Shubman's 104-run knock in the second essay besides pacer Jasprit Bumrah's sensational bowling effort to secure a series-leveling 106-run win. There are a few concerns when you look at the team – batting is something that they will be talking about because under these conditions on this sort of a surface we have seen India do better Zaheer said on JioCinema. India set England a 399-run target and despite Zak Crawley being the only one breaching the half-century mark the visitors were able to score 292 runs. You look at England's second innings there is only one half-century and they still managed to get close to 300. That is what collective effort can do.
—*PTI*

Bartlett stars on debut as Australia crushes West Indies to take 3-0 series lead **PHOTO: TWITTER**

Australia claim clean sweep vs West Indies

CANBERRA, 6 FEB

Xavier Bartlett registered a four-wicket haul as Australia defeated West Indies by eight wickets in the third and final ODI on Tuesday. Opting to bowl first, the hosts bundled out West Indies for just 86. Apart from Bartlett, Lance Morris and Adam Zampa also scalped two wickets each.Later, Australia chased down the target in just 6.5 overs with debutant opener Jake Fraser-McGurk and Josh Inglis scoring 41 and 35 runs respectively. With this win, Australia whitewashed the three-match series 3-0

Lance Morris' spectacular return was cut short by a side strain injury, but Xavier Bartlett continued a strong start to his international career with four wickets as Australia thrashed a hapless West Indies at Manuka Oval to sweep the ODI series.

Openers Josh Inglis and Jake Fraser-McGurk raced toward the low target by smashing 67 runs within five overs. They had struck Australia's fastest team 50 in men's ODIs since 2002.

Bartlett had starred with 4 for 21 as West Indies were embarrassingly bowled out for 86 in 24.1 overs in their fifth-lowest ODI score. Playing their 1000th ODI, the second nation to do so after India, Australia was almost flawless following comprehensive victories in Melbourne and Sydney.

Inglis raced to 22 off seven deliveries as he played gorgeous orthodox shots, but was quickly overtaken by Fraser-McGurk who muscled three sixes in four balls off seamer Matthew Forde.

Australia 87 for 2 (Fraser-McGurk 41, Inglis 35*) beat West Indies 86 (Bartlett 4-21) by eight wickets.—*AP*

India hockey player Varun Kumar accused of rape, booked under POCSO act

BENGALURU / NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Arjuna award-winning Indian hockey player Varun Kumar has been booked under the stringent POCSO act by the Bengaluru Police after a woman accused the defender of sexually abusing her multiple times when she was a minor. The 22-year-old in her complaint filed on Monday said that she came in contact with Varun in 2018 through Instagram and the player raped her on multiple occasions promising her marriage when she was 17.She said Varun was training at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) center in Bengaluru when she met him. Varun who was awarded the Arjuna in 2021 was recently promoted as a DSP in Punjab Police.
—*PTI*

Kane puts a stamp on NZ

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, 6 FEB

Kane Williamson followed his first-innings 118 of 289 with a more enterprising 109 off 132 balls to flatten a depleted South Africa and power New Zealand's lead to a gigantic 528 at the end of the third day. South Africa had earlier been bowled out for 162 as New Zealand further pushed for victory despite not opting to enforce the follow-on after taking a lead of 349 in the first innings.

Williamson went from 29 to 31 Test centuries in a matter of three days and unlike in the first innings, he scored quicker and held the New Zealand innings together even though they were well ahead in the game when he walked out to bat at 10 for 1. Barring a classical straight drive early in his innings, also off de Swardt, Kane scored most of his runs square of the pitch and behind it with his trademark dabs on the off-side and pulls off the shorter balls. Like in the first innings, he showed some signs of frustration when he couldn't pierce the gaps early on and got a life when he uncharacteris tically heaved Paterson to deep square leg where Edward Moore shelled a sitter. New Zealand 511 & 179 for 4 (Kane 109, Mitchell 11*) lead South Africa 162 (Petersen 45, Henry 3-31, Santner 3-34) by 528 runs.
—*AP*

Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi **PHOTO: AP**

PCB appoints Naqvi as its chairman

LAHORE, 6 FEB

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Tuesday unanimously elected veteran administrator Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi as its chairman for a three-year term. The election was held at a special meeting of the Board of Governors (BoG) at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Lahore. "I am deeply honored and humbled to have been unanimously elected as the Chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board Naqvi was quoted saying on the PCB website.

I am thankful for the trust and confidence reposed in me. I am fully committed to upgrading the standard of the game in the country and bringing professionalism to the administration of cricket in Pakistan. A Pakistani media baron the 45-year-old Naqbi is the 37th full-time chairman of the PCB. Presently he is serving as the incumbent caretaker Chief Minister of the State of Punjab. Former Pakistan skipper Ramiz Raja was their last full-time chairman before he was sacked one year into his tenure due to political interference in December 2022. Najam Sethi and Zaka Ashraf then held the post as interim chiefs with the latter stepping down in January this year.
—*AP*

Zimbabwe to host India for five T20Is after T20 World Cup

PATTAYA, 6 FEB

Zimbabwe will host India for a five-match T20I series in July, a week after the conclusion of the T20 World Cup in the West Indies and the USA. All five games will be played in Harare, from July 6 to 14. Four of the five T20Is will be day games, starting at 1 pm local time. The third T20I, the only night match, will begin at 6 pm.

"We are thrilled to be hosting India for a T20I series in July in what will be our biggest international attraction at home this year," Zimbabwe Cricket chairman Tavengwa Mukuhlani said in a press release. "The significance and magnitude of this tour cannot be over-emphasized, especially as it is coming at a time we are working round the clock to re-establish ourselves as a force to reckon with at the highest level of the game."

India last toured Zimbabwe for three ODIs in August 2022, when they won 3-0. Since then, the two sides have met only once across formats, at the T20 World Cup in Australia later that year.

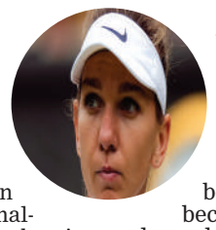
Overall, the two teams have played eight T20Is each other, with India winning six of them.

Zimbabwe could not qualify for this year's T20 World Cup even though as many as 20 teams will participate for the first time in the tournament. Before that, they had failed to cut the 2023 ODI World Cup as well.

Fixtures
6 July: 1st T20I
7 July: 2nd T20I
10 July: 3rd T20I
13 July: 4th T20I
14 July: 5th T20I
—*AP*

Halep's appeal of 4-year doping ban begins today

PARIS, 6 FEB



Former top-ranked tennis player Simona Halep will go to the sport's highest court on Wednesday to challenge her four-year ban in a doping case.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport said on Tuesday that Halep plans to attend in person when the appeal opens for a closed-doors hearing scheduled over three days.

The court said in a statement, "No indication can be given as to when the final arbitral award will be notified to the parties."

Two-time Grand Slam champion Halep aims to overturn the ban imposed by the International Tennis Integrity Agency last September.

It runs into October 2026 when the Romanian star will be 35.

Halep tested positive for roxadustat at the 2022 U.S. Open to begin a case that became more complex when investigators detected alleged irregularities in her biological passport, which aims to detect abnormal blood values measured over several years. Roxadustat, according to the European Union's medicines agency, stimulates the body to produce more of the natural hormone erythropoietin, or EPO.

It has long been a doping product favored by cyclists and distance runners. Halep denies wrongdoing and blames contaminated nutritional supplements.
—*AP*

Sachin, and Sagar storm into the q/fs of Strandja Memorial

SOFIA (BULGARIA), 6 FEB

Former world youth champion Sachin and Commonwealth Games silver medallist Sagar entered the quarterfinals on day three of the 75th Strandja Memorial Tournament here on Tuesday.Sachin (57kg) was up against Uzbekistan's Fayzov Khudoynazar in the pre-quarters and both the boxers came out with an attacking intent but it was Fayzov who took a slight advantage in the first round.Sachin looked transformed in the second round and initiated a comeback by using his quick reflexes to dodge multiple attacks before landing some accurate jabs.In the third round, he was at his attacking best, leaving his opponent clueless with his sharp punches and quick movements, ultimately grabbing a phenomenal 3-2 win to enter the quarter-finals. He will now face Kapanadze Giorgi of Georgia on Friday.Sagar (92+kg) faced Lithuania's Jazeviciius Jonas in the pre-quarters.
—*AP*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Foden hattrick hauls Man City within 2 points of lead

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Pep Guardiola said Phil Foden is enjoying his best season at Manchester City after the England international's hat-trick beat Brentford 3-1 on Monday to leave the Premier League's top three separated by just two points.

City moves alongside Arsenal on 49 points, two behind Liverpool, but Guardiola's men have a game in hand to move out in front. The defending champions became the first side in Premier League history to win four consecutive away games despite falling behind in all of them.

Neal Maupay fired the Bees in front against the run of play, but there was little doubt over the outcome once Foden leveled in first-half stoppage time.

Kevin De Bruyne and Erling Haaland then teed up the England international to complete his second career hat-trick after the break.

"He's a guy with a sense of goal," said Guardiola after Foden took his tally for the season to 14.

"I think he is playing his best season since we are together. The incidence of goals and assists, of playing in this central position, are unbelievable."

Phil Foden, center, celebrates with Manchester City's Erling Haaland, left, and Manchester City's Josko Gvardiol after scoring his side's third goal **PHOTO: AP**

City's rivals for the title may rue not opening up an advantage while De Bruyne and Haaland were sidelined by injury in recent months as they look primed to become the first side to ever win four consecutive English top-flight titles.

Brentford goalkeeper Mark Flekken started the night as statistically the worst goalkeeper in the Premier League for the percentage of shots saved.

However, the Dutchman was in inspired form to frustrate the champions in the opening 45 minutes as he made nine saves before the break.

Brentford had barely posed any threat before they went in front on 21 minutes as City's run of just one Premier League clean sheet since October goes on.

Flekken got the assist on top of his heroics at the back as from his goal-kick, Ivan Toney blocked off Nathan Ake, allowing Maupay to run clear and score for the fifth consecutive game.

Haaland had a huge chance to mark his first start for two months with a goal moments later, but could not beat Flekken when sent clean through on goal.

In total City had 17 efforts on goal with 10 on target in the first half and finally made their final one count.
—*AP*